



Consumers' brand origin perceptions through visual appeals in international fashion advertisement

Marketing

Master's thesis

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2012

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Työn nimi Kuluttajien alkuperähavainnot muotibrändien kansainvälisten mainosten visuaalisen ilmeen kautta		
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Hyväksymisvuosi 2012	Sivumäärä 104	Kieli englanti

Tiivistelmä

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tutkia, miten kuluttajat havainnoivat vihjeitä brändin alkuperämaasta muotibrändien kansainvälisten mainosten visuaalisten ilmeiden kautta. Kuluttajakulttuuri on nykyisin yhä visuaalisempaa ja kuluttajat etsivät hedonistisia kokemuksia, joita mainosten kuluttaminen sellaisenaan voi tarjota. Tämä koskee erityisesti muotibrändejä, jotka ovat jo lähtökohtaisesti esteettisiä luonteeltaan. Alkuperämaa on tärkeä kriteeri, jota kuluttajat käyttävät arvioidessaan muoti-, erityisesti luksusbrändejä. Aiempi tutkimus mainosten visuaalisen ilmeen ja kuluttajien brändin alkuperämaahavainnoiden välisestä suhteesta on kuitenkin rajallista. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli lisätä ymmärrystä tästä suhteesta.

Tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena. 15 opiskelijaa vastasi kyselylomakkeeseen, joka koski neljää, lähinnä kuvista koostuvaa Marimekon mainosta. Vastaajien kuvailujen perusteella määriteltiin käsite ”suomalainen alkuperä”. Tutkimusaineistosta nousi kolme eri tapaa kuvailla vihjeitä alkuperämaasta, joiden analysointia ohjasi aiemmin määritellyn viitekehyksen pääulottuvuudet. Kuvauksia alkuperämaasta ja brändistä analysointiin myös suhteessa ”suomalaiseen alkuperän” määritelmään.

Tutkimustulokset viittasivat siihen, että kuluttajat arvioivat positiivisemmin mainoksia, jotka ovat kuvapainotteisia, ja joiden kautta kuluttajat pystyvät luomaan narratiiveja. Nämä mainokset olivat myös niitä, joiden kautta yhteys alkuperään koettiin vahvimmin kuluttajien kehittämien tarinoiden kautta. Tämän lisäksi nämä visuaaliset ja narratiiviset mainokset assosioitiin kansainvälisiin luksusbrändeihin, mikä näytti vaikuttavat kuluttajien laatuarviointeihin brändistä. Tulokset viittasivat myös siihen, että kuluttajien alkuperähavainnot perustuvat hyvin stereotyyppisiin määritelmiin alkuperämaasta.

Avainsanat alkuperämaa, muotibrändi, kansainvälinen mainonta, luksusbrändi, kuluttajien havainnot

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Title of thesis Consumers' brand origin perceptions through visual appeals in international fashion advertisement		
Degree Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration		
Degree programme Marketing		
Thesis advisor(s) Annukka Jyrämä		
Year of approval 2012	Number of pages 104	Language English

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore consumers' brand origin perceptions through visual appeals in the international advertisement of Finnish fashion brands. Contemporary consumer culture is becoming more and more visual, and consumers are looking for hedonic experiences that consuming ads as such can provide. This is especially the case with fashion brands that are of aesthetic nature. Furthermore, brand origin is something consumers look for in high-end design products such as luxury fashion. However, previous research on the relationship between visual appeals in fashion advertisement and consumers' brand origin perceptions remains limited. This study aimed to provide some insight to this relationship.

The research question was explored through a qualitative approach. 15 university students answered a self-completion questionnaire concerning four highly visual ads of Marimekko. The notion of "Finnish origin" was defined based on the respondents' definitions. Three different levels of origin perception descriptions rose from the data that were reflected against the main dimensions of the theoretical framework and the definition of the "Finnish origin".

The results suggested that consumers evaluate ads that are highly visual and through which they are able to perform a narrative more positively. These were also the ones through which consumers were able to create the strongest and most correct origin perceptions. Moreover, these highly visual and narrative ads were ones that created associations with international luxury brands and this seemed to affect the quality evaluations of the brand. The results also indicated that consumers' origin perceptions are based on rather stereotypical origin definitions.

Keywords brand origin, advertising, fashion, visual appeals, luxury brand, consumer perceptions

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1. Introduction

1.1. *Background*

Finland and its country brand have been under increased interest of late. Finland and Finnish companies have been gaining attention in the international media; in the year 2010 Newsweek listed Finland as the World's best place to live, after which Monocle published its Finland survey and magazines like the Italian Vogue, The Guardian and The New York Times have printed articles of Finland, and especially Helsinki, describing these as cool and hip places. The increased interest in Finland has not been limited only to the international media; the anticipated Finnish country brand report was published late in the year 2010 with large media coverage and a vast public debate, which indicates that the image of Finland is of interest these days. The Finnish origin appears to be a current topic which potency should be deployed in the international brand communications of Finnish companies, particularly if the Finnish origin is part of their identity. Especially creative industries such as design fashion can benefit from the blooming reputation of hip and cool in their international brand communications.

It is well recognized, that companies from the small and open economies (SMOPEC) are increasingly forced to seek growth from international markets (Luostarinen, 1994). This is also the situation with Finland; Finland has relatively small home markets and internationalization is becoming a natural choice for Finnish companies. However, seeking growth from global markets does not come without challenges; with international operations, competition increases and companies face the situation where they do not necessarily enjoy the high brand recognition as they do in their home markets. Moving from small markets like Finland, to the sizable markets of North America, Asia and other parts of Europe, is a substantial change. Particularly, the small Finnish design brands that may have created themselves' a certain status in Finland will be confronted by the situation where they are newcomers without established image (Lambert & Jaffe, 1997).

Potential source for differentiation could be a link to their origin and the stories told about this culture. According to Holt (2004), brands do not compete in product markets, but in myth markets. One source of myths for brands, are the narratives of their culture of origin. Consumers link certain associations to specific cultures and countries, which can be utilized in brand management. Koubaa (2007) states country image perceptions to occur in consumers' mind before the brand image perceptions. Similarly, Lambert & Jaffe (1997) assert country of origin (COO) to have an impact on product image before the brand name plays a role in international marketing. Thus, the effect and possibilities of origin should be taken into account in the international brand management.

However, the country of origin effect is stated to be product category specific (Lambert & Jaffe, 1997). In order to benefit from the country of origin associations, there should be a positive link between a brand's core offer and the country specific production. Scandinavia is known for its simple design and furthermore, Finland has gained reputation as the home of architects such as Alvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen, and designers like Eero Aarnio and Aino Aalto. Thus, it can be said that Finnish design brands possess good prerequisites for the utilization of Finland as a culture of origin. However, even if the product category specify might be favourable for Finnish design brands, they are likely to loose the opportunity to benefit from this, if the brand origin is not part of their identity and/or this is not actively communicated to the target customers. It is an interesting question, how Finnish design fashion brands can benefit from the positive associations of Finland as a producer of industrial design and architecture in international markets. The ccontemporary culture is becoming more and more visual, where consumers are searching experiences through visual images among others. Visual appeal is also the most significant aspect of an advertising message (An, 2007). This is especially important for fashion brands that are of aesthetic nature. Thus, it is interesting question whether the cues of Finnish origin are communicated through advertising and how these are conveyed through visual appeals in advertising.

The country of origin effects remains the most researched topic related to the international competition of brands (Al-Sulaiti and Baker, 1998). There have been some studies related to Finland as the country of origin and also to the effects of COO for Finnish design brands (e.g. Ryan, 2008; Noor, 2004). However, the research related to the country of origin of Finnish design, especially fashion, brands remains limited. Furthermore, previous studies suffer from the lack of discussion related to the role of origin cues in the international advertisement of fashion brands, moreover, in their visual appeals.

The following section will introduce the purpose of this thesis and present the research questions.

1.2. *Research questions*

The purpose of this thesis is to study consumers' brand origin perceptions through visual appeals in the international advertisement of Finnish fashion brands. The main research question of this thesis is how consumers perceive brand origin cues through visual appeals in the international advertisement of fashion brands: I will approach the question through the following sub-questions:

- How the brand origin is associated with the company brand identity and image?
- How consumers perceive brand origin cues through international advertisement?
- How the visual appeals affect consumers' interpretations of fashion advertisement?

Next, the key concepts of this thesis will be defined.

1.3. Definitions

Brand identity is the company's definition of how the company wants the target group to see the brand. It is the company's definition of itself. (Aaker et al., 2000a, 51; Kapferer, 1997, 91-92).

Brand image is the way consumers perceive the brand; it is the sum of associations consumers attach to a brand (Koubaa, 2008).

In this thesis, **brand origin** is defined according to Takhor and Kohli (1996) "the place, region, or country where the brand is perceived to belong by its target customers". Generally, the place where the head office is located can be viewed as the origin location. In order to maintain clarity for the reader, in this thesis all the alternative notions that possess the same meaning as defined here (i.e. brand of origin, culture of brand origin), will be replaced by the notion of brand origin.

Design can be defined in various ways. In Scandinavian languages design traditionally refers mainly to the aesthetic features of an object. In English, the term is defined more widely; design refers to the broad, design process lasting through the whole lifecycle. (Ainamo et al., 2004). In this thesis, a **design brand** refers to a brand that has design, in its Scandinavian meaning, as its core competitive advantage.

In the following subchapter, the structure of this thesis will be presented.

1.4. Structure

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. This introductory Chapter 1 has presented the background, research questions and defined the central concepts of this thesis. Chapter 2 examines issues related to the brand identity and image associations with a brand origin in the context of design, specifically the fashion industry and will be divided in two subchapters. The

first subchapter will focus on the relationship between brand identity and image, and the origin associations. The second subchapter will discuss how consumers perceive the origin associations and how these affect the brand evaluations. Chapter 3 explores issues related to the origin cue transfer through visual appeals in fashion advertisement and will be divided into two subchapters. The first subchapter will look into the way origin cues are communicated through international advertising with special attention to the challenges of international advertisement environment. The second subchapter will concentrate on the cue transfer through visual appeals in fashion advertisement, particularly how consumers interpret the visual appeals of fashion advertisement. Chapter 4 introduces the theoretical framework of this thesis. Chapter 5 presents the empirical research, looking first into the methods used in conducting the research, followed by the collected data. Chapter 6 analyses the findings of the empirical research in the light of the theories discussed in chapters 2 and 3. The final chapter concludes the main issues of the thesis by returning to the aims of the study and to the findings and implications of the research, furthermore the limitations of this thesis will be discussed and suggestions for future research will be proposed.

2. Brand identity and image associations with a brand origin

This chapter examines the previous literature related to the concept of brand origin associations. The first subchapter presents the notions of brand identity and image association, specifically how the origin associations are formed both by the brand and consumers. The second subchapter discusses consumers' origin perceptions with a special focus on how consumers detect origin cues, how accurately this is done and how the origin perceptions affect the consumers' brand evaluations.

Design brands, which include fashion brands and all luxury brands, incorporate specific features characteristic for them that create a framework for all their actions. For a design brand, design is a vital part of the company strategy. The core competence of these companies is design. According to Lahti (1993) design industries are industries where design is the most central value factor (see Salimäki, 2003, 18). Product design is central to the company culture and to the brand identity (Ravasi, 2008).

Design brand function on saturated markets where the meaning of differentiation is highlighted and brand are satisfying existing needs (Salimäki, 2003, 19). Design products are rarely big innovations and consumers are likely to own a substitutive product but the different design acts as an incentive to buy a design product. Fashion is a good example of this, since women may own five skirts that are substitutive to each other, but differ in design. Another example of this is the difference between two different kinds of pepper mills: a pepper mill bought from a market does not have the same value as a decorative element as Alessi's Anna pepper mill, and the incentive to buy differs with each mills. Consumers do not necessarily buy a design product for its functionality. A different example of this is Philippe Starck's design for Alessi, the Juicy Sarif lemon squeezer. It doesn't really work as it is supposed to, but trickled all the juices around the glass. Afterwards Starck said that it was "not meant to squeeze lemons" but

"to start conversations" (Norman, 2005). The Juicy Sarif acts more as a decorative object rather than squeezer. However, even though design is used as a synonym for aesthetic properties of a brand in this thesis, it is important to note that design in its wider meaning is vital for brands. Through good design usability of products is ameliorated. In general, design should be used to make the functionality of products/brands better, not just to make them aesthetically more appealing.

In the saturated markets where design brands most often compete, they gain realistic competitiveness through the added value that design offers to consumers. According to previous research, design companies are placed in more expensive product categories or in the markets of high added value. (Walsh et al. 1992; Riedel, Roy et al. 1996; see Lindström et al., 2006, 35). A company's competitiveness can be divided into price competitiveness and realistic competitiveness. The first mentioned is based on cost factors whereas the latter refers to the company's overall knowhow, marketing and knowledge. Realistic competitiveness enables the rise of the product's value added when the product can be sold on premium price. (Lindström et al., 2006, 28). With design referred in this thesis (the aesthetic features of a product and a brand) can be affected to the company's realistic competitiveness. With aesthetics a product can be differentiated from competing products and create added value for customers. The added value customers perceive from the product permits a higher selling price that turns into increased profits. An excellent example of this is luxury products. In example the Hermès Birkin bag is handmade and the craftsmanship takes days. All the used materials are of high quality and the price of the bag can be tens of thousands Euros. However, the customers perceive the value from these bags so high that the waiting lists for these can be several months long.

The added value of design brands comes from the fact that they are not something consumers need, but rather means for self-expression. Design helps people feel they are different (Ravasi, 2008). Design products are something through which people can communicate who they are or who they wished to be. Typical for a design brand are the immaterial benefits they

convey. A chair bought from Ikea is just a chair whereas an Alvar Aalto chair bought from Artek creates certain associations to Finnish living and high quality, and you know Aalto designed it by just one glimpse. Design brands convey highly expressional and experiential benefits (Ravasi, 2008). Symbolic (or social) benefits complete consumers' desires for self-enhancements, self-identification and group membership. Experiential benefits fulfil consumers for sensory pleasure or cognitive stimulation. Benefit-oriented brand associations, such as design, contain much more information than product attributes, thus the benefit oriented image dimensions give directions at the strategic marketing level (Hsieh et. al., 2004). While luxury brands are just one form of design brands, the following description captures the essence of all design brands:

When buying a luxury product consumers are not buying just a product but a package that concerns the product and a combination of immaterial benefits that appeal to the emotional, social and psychological levels of their being. (Okonkwo, 2007, 2).

These specificities of design brands define a framework inside which the other entire brand related elements are analyzed. In this thesis, the theory and examples on luxury brands are used throughout the text, since in the case of luxury brands the specific features of design brands are often highlighted and thus more visible. Furthermore, often the brand origin, which is under study in this thesis, plays an important role for luxury brands.

2.1. Brand identity and image associations

This subchapter presents the notion of brand identity and brand image. The first section introduces the notion of brand identity and discusses the associations that brand managers would like to be attached to the brand. Special attention is paid to the associations related to brand origin and heritage. The second section will examine the brand associations consumers

posses that will form their image of a brand. Furthermore, the country image and its relation to brand associations is discussed.

The traditional viewpoint to product branding focuses on questions concerning brand architecture, positioning and identity. However, when talking about the whole corporate brand this viewpoint needs to be expanded. From this perspective the brand needs to be viewed in relation to other brands and entities (Schultz, 2005, 27), such as countries and how these are perceived by consumers. Today's brand management is lot more complicated than it used to be and the complex crossings between different brands need more thorough assessment (Leder et al., 2001). Any construct that is conceptualized within a single dimension is improbable to capture the representation of image perception of a brand (Hsieh et al. 2005). Brands cannot be defined only by companies themselves; it is important to understand how consumers view the brand, what kind of associations they create when forming the brand image.

2.1.1. Brand identity

Brands are not just products rather whole packages that create an identity for products. This identity creates a baseline for all the associations and perceptions consumers will have about that brand. (Okonkwo, 2007, 4). A well-defined brand identity acts as a basis for the management of a purposeful and successful brand strategy (Aaker et al., 2000a, 31). For brands that have achieved the desired iconic status, the strategic focus has been on what the brand stands for, on its identity, not how the brand performs (Holt, 2003).

Brand identity is the company's definition of itself. The identity structure has different levels of identity associations the company wants to be attached to the brand that possess different importance depending on the context. The brand identity structure includes the notion of brand personality. As persons,

brands have their roots in some origin that is most likely to affect their personality.

According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000a, 51), brand identity is the company's definition of how the company wants the target group to see the brand. Kapferer (1997, 91-92) defines brand identity through the following questions

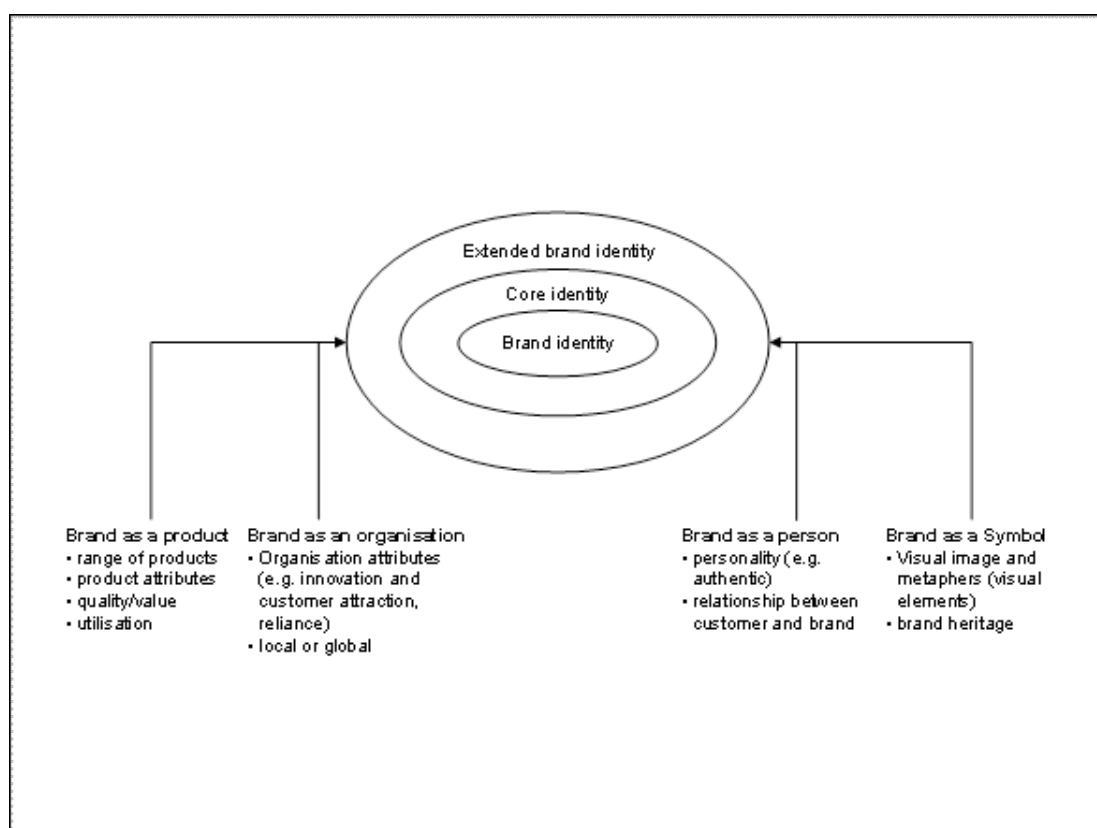
- What are the vision and the purpose of the brand?
- What separates the brand from the others and makes it recognizable?
- What are the values of the brand?
- What are the needs the brand answers to?

The answers to these questions form the brand identity. From both of these definitions it can be concluded that brand identity is a company's definition of itself.

A versatile and coherent brand identity acts as a prerequisite for a strong brand (Aaker et al., 2000a, 66). The corporate brand is based on diverse and combined mindset what the organization stands for. It strives to create relations to stakeholders that in their turn define the essence of the organization and what it wants to stand for. Corporate branding allows the expression of a clear identity and the corporate heritage to stakeholders while engaging these stakeholders to this process, making the difference of the company binding and relevant (Schultz et al. 2005, 24-26).

The brand identity structure consists of a core identity, an extended identity, and a brand essence (Aaker et al. 2000b. 43). At the heart of the identity is the brand essence surrounded by the core identity and at the outermost the extended identity (Picture 1). The essence ties together all the parts of the core identity into a one sentence, from a different angle. However, essence is not the same as the brand slogan; it represents the brand identity mostly inside the company while the slogan is communicated targeted to audiences outside the company. (Aaker, 2000a, 73-76). For example, Nike's essence "Authentic Athletic Performance" summarizes the brand identity into one

sentence. In comparison, the brand slogan “Just do it.” is catchy but doesn’t really tell anything about the identity. The core identity includes all the associations that are most likely to stay the same even though the brand would move to new markets and would expand its product portfolio. At the core are all the features that make the brand unique and valuable. The extended identity supplements the core identity. It includes elements that make the brand memorable and different such as brand’s personality features, logo and slogan. (Aaker 1996, 85-88).



Picture 1: Brand identity, Aaker et al., 2000

The extended brand identity elements are divided around four perspectives: the brand as product, organization, person, and symbol (Picture 1). Even though all categories have relevance for some brands, almost no brand has associations in all of these. (Aaker et al. 2000. 43). As this thesis focuses on the brand origin, the perspectives of brand as a person and as a symbol will be discussed more thoroughly since they encompass different elements of origin information. Brand as a person includes the notion of personality, which further on contains the brand origin information (Thakor, 1996). Brand

as a symbol incorporates brand heritage information (Aaker et al., 2000b) that has a strong link to the origins of a company. This perspective will be explored more thoroughly in chapter 3 that will study the different aspects of brand advertisement, especially its visual image, as the brand as a symbol can be considered to be a more communicative perspective to a brand.

The perspective of brand as person comprehends the notion of personality: as every person, brands have a personality that makes them unique. Brand personality can provide needed information. Having a personality can make a brand appealing and memorable. Brand personality also stimulates the clues of what kinds of elements the brand is constructed of such as energy and youthfulness. It also helps customers to understand the brand-customer relationship whether the brand is a friend, advisor or a party companion. (Aaker et al. 2000b, 53). Just as with people, a strong and different personality is more likely to be remembered than a personality that does not really say anything. Consumers perceive social and emotional value from brands. The brand personality enhances the perceived utility and desirability of a brand (Kotler et al., 2002). Similarly, Kapferer (2004, 120) states brands to have personalities that gradually build up their character through communications. The tone of communications, the way in which the brand speaks, reveals what kind of person it would be if it were a person. The brand becomes more appealing when personality characteristics are incorporated into the brand, since consumers are more probably to affiliate with brands that have desirable personalities. (Ballantyne et al., 2006).

For most persons, their place of birth or their domicile plays an important role on defining their personality. Comparably, brand origin designates a brand's personality. Identity has its roots on the founding acts as a brand: its products, channels, communications and places. (Kapferer, 2004, 120). Similarly as a place of birth acts as a demographic variable for people, the brand origin can be considered as a part of a brand's personality (Thakor, 1996). Some brands naturally make known the identity of their country of origin. For them, a vital part of their unique brand identity is drawn from their geographical roots. (Kapferer, 2004, 120). However, the importance of this variable differs with different brands (Thakor, 1996). Identity derives from the

brand's roots and heritage, from the precise values and benefits that give it its unique authority and authenticity (Kapferer, 2004, 102). Brands exploit their heritage and cultural image in differing themselves from others (Schultz et al., 2005, 28). A brand's history makes it unique. A reference to their heritage is common for fashion brands, i.e. the American heritage is evident for Tommy Hilfiger, which in the brand's ads is often shown through elements of the East Coast country life.

Brand identity is formed from a set of associations the company desires to create or maintain (Aaker et al., 2000b, 43) such as the different elements of brand personality. However, these associations remain meaningless if the target audience will not associate these to the brand. A brand image is the way consumers perceive the brand; it is the sum of associations consumers attach to a brand (Koubaa, 2008). Even though the brand identity provides a deeper understanding about a brand, the brand image needs to be taken into considerations as well as it represents the way consumers perceive the brand. None of the brand identity elements matter if these are not communicated to the consumers and they will not associate these to the brand. A brand has value only if consumers acknowledge its existence and associate the correct elements to it, in other words, only if consumers' brand image matches the brand identity defined by the corporation.

Next the brand image and the brand associations consumers possess will be discussed.

2.1.2. Brand image and origin associations

Brand image is an important concept as it represents consumer's perception of the brand. The brand image is created in consumers' minds from various associations that are in complex relations with each other. Important for this thesis is how consumers create associations with the brand origin. A country image is created similarly to a brand image from different associations. These associations linked to a country are further transferred to a brand

image through the origin associations consumers attach to a brand. Next, consumers' image associations are discussed.

Brand image is the perceptions customers and other stakeholders attach to a specific brand. These perceptions can be both reasoned and emotional (Koubaa, 2008). Image reflects all the past activities that have influenced the mental images and opinions of stakeholders about the corporate brand (Aaker, 1996, 69-70). Brand image is dynamic (Harris et al., 2001); it is in continuous alteration with stakeholders' perceptions.

Brand image is formed from brand associations (Koubaa, 2008). Associations are informational nodes linked to a specific brand in memory that hold the meaning of that brand for consumers (Keller et al., 1998). The associative network model states that a person's memory is constructed of links and nodes. In the model, links symbolize relationships (whether they are they positive or negative, weak or strong), and nodes illustrate concepts (such as brand associations) and objects (i.e. brands). (Farquhar et al., 1993). When assessing brand associations the level of abstraction needs to be taken into consideration as the brand and the consumer's sense of self might have a hierarchic linkage through an interconnected collection of cognitive components with different levels of abstraction. (Koubaa, 2008). At an abstract level, brand associations are considered in the form of benefits and brand attitudes that sum-up the information related to the brand. These form a more relevant relationship with the consumer self than product attributes do. (Hsieh et al. 2005).

The effect of consumers linking a brand to a person, place, thing, or a brand is called the brand-leveraging process. When analyzing this process two things needs to be taken into consideration: what consumers already know about the brand and how linking the brand to other objects might influence this knowledge. (Keller, 2003). It is important to understand, that the brand image stems from consumers' experience and memory with the brand, which includes the actual user experiences with the brand or being exposed to the brand communications (Ballantyne et al., 2006). It could be said that Keller's (2003) statement contains the assumption that the leveraging process is

applied only to brands that already have set position in consumers minds and new linkages would be additional information to the old associations consumers' posses about brands. However, it could be argued that all these kinds of linkages can be already part of the early foundations of brands. Keller (2003) expresses that consumers might associate all the following with a brand:

1. Awareness – category identification and needs satisfied by the brand.
2. Attributes – descriptive features that characterize the brand name or product either intrinsically (e.g. related to product performance) or extrinsically (e.g. related to brand personality or heritage).
3. Benefits – personal value and meaning consumers attach to the brand's product attributes
4. Visual images – visual information, either concrete or abstract in nature.
5. Thoughts – personal cognitive responses to any brand related information
6. Feelings – personal affective responses to any brand related information
7. Attitudes – summary judgements and overall evaluations to any brand-related information
8. Experiences – purchase and consumption behaviours and any other brand-related episodes.

Consumers' knowledge and beliefs about a brand's different attributes form the image they hold about that specific brand (Samiee et al., 2005). It is important to understand how consumers create their brand-knowledge in order to combine these various entities best and create an optimal positioning in the minds of consumers (Keller, 2003).

Special focus in this thesis is paid to attributes, benefits and visual images. Attributes are descriptive features that characterize the brand extrinsically through heritage that is strongly related to the country of the brand origin. Experiential benefits are becoming increasingly important for consumers and are something people look in from brands, especially from hedonic brands that fashion brands are. As the purpose of this thesis is to look into to the origin cue transfer through visual appeal, visual images are under special

focus in this thesis. Some of the other dimensions will be discussed as well, but the focus will be in the preciously mentioned.

Ballantyne et al. (2006) state that consumers tend to categorize together brands that resemble each other in terms of product attributes. This is important since all consumer decisions are based on comparison (Kapferer, 2004, 100). As noted before, brand attributes include ones related to heritage and personality, in other words ones related to the origin. Thus, consumers tend to compare brands from the same countries with each other create associations through comparison. This issue will be discussed more thoroughly in the next subchapter.

Besides attributes, brand benefits are under discussion in this thesis. In contemporary consumers culture people are becoming less interested in generic products offering solely functional benefits. Instead, people want brands, and experiences delivering meaning and emotional benefits. (Jackson et al., 2009, 259). Consumption is a means to make statement about oneself and create identity (Atwall et al., 2009). Hedonic products (i.e. design items) are consumed to fulfil people's graving for sensory pleasure or to satisfy the symbolic needs related to the way consumers define themselves and others perceive them (Ryu et al., 2006). As discussed in the beginning of the chapter, design products, such as fashion items, are something through which people can communicate who they are or who they wished to be. Consumers buy fashion brands since they are a combination of immaterial benefits that attract the emotional, social and psychological levels of their being (Okonkwo, 2007, 2).

Hedonic products are assessed mostly based on aesthetics, taste and sensory experience, and how well the brand communicates the wanted meanings (Ryu et al., 2006). Furthermore, a lot of the activities concerning luxury goods are of an aesthetic nature (Atwal et al., 2009). As the purpose of this thesis is to study how consumers perceive fashion brands ads, visual images are discussed more thoroughly in this study. Moreover, today's consumer culture is becoming more and more visually led and fashion ads tend to be visual in nature. These issues will be presented later in this thesis.

As brands have an image in consumers' minds, so do countries. The country image is transferred to a product or a brand through the location associations consumers possess. Places can have strong self-expressive associations and elements that can be linked to the brand and contribute to the emotional dimension of brand reputation (Berens and Va Riel, 2004; see Uggla, 2006). According to Kapferer (2004, 120), brands can benefit from the values of their country of origin.

Country image can be defined in many ways. Roth et al. (1992) define country image as *"the overall perception consumers form of the products from a particular country, based on their prior perceptions of the country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses"*. Developing the notion from product and marketing related perceptions to a wider sum of associations, Kotler et al. (2002) define country image as *"the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place."* In the thesis, the latter wider definition will be deployed as it captures more comprehensive amount of clues.

The country image perceived by consumers is a sum of different characteristics consumers associate with that particular country. Company acting in international markets should identify the national characteristics that could influence the success of its image strategies (Hsieh et al., 2004). There are several characteristics affecting the country image. Roth et al. (1992) identify four country image dimensions: innovativeness, design (appearance, style, colours, variety), prestige (exclusivity, status, brand name reputation) and workmanship (reliability, durability, craftsmanship, manufacturing quality). All of these are production and marketing oriented (Roth et al., 1992). However, it could be argued that there are a larger number of attributes affecting the country image such as political and economic situation, the level of development etc., that are also important to the way people evaluate a country. Even though countries do not actively manage their brand, people still have images of countries that influence their decisions related to purchasing, travelling etc. Besides history, art, music, geography, famous citizens etc., entertainment industry and media play an

important role in moulding people's images of countries. (Kotler et. al., 2002). It should be noted though that most of the country images are stereotypes (Kotler et al., 2002). In example, Finland is often represented as a cold country, with snow, darkness and introvert inhabitants. This is evident in the following quote from Kapferer (2004, 120): *"Finland is the country where the earth ends – a cold, austere, unspoilt, remote land, where the sun scrapes the ground."*

The country image plays an important role on consumer perceptions of a brand as they associate the brand or its products to a specific origin. Hsieh et al. (2004) state that consumer behaviour is affected in addition to product image, by corporate and country image as they provide meaningful associations to create appealing image on an umbrella level. Similarly, Lambert et al. (1998) propose that the country of origin effect is comparable with the role of a family branding in the case of a new brand. The country image affects the product image before the brand name has established a position in the market; thus, the country image is transferred to the new brand in that particular market. Basic information, such as the information on an umbrella level, is more predominant than specific information, and so, more easily available (Hsieh et al., 2004). Therefore, it is important to ensure that consumers have a positive image of the umbrella brands, such as the country of origin. (Hsieh et al., 2004). It could be argued that in addition to a positive image, the fit between the brand image and the country image should be positive.

2.2. Brand origin perceptions

This subchapter introduces the notion of brand origin perceptions. The first section examines the notion of brand origin cues and how accurately consumers recognise these. The second section assesses the different effects consumers' origin perceptions have on brand evaluations.

Brand origin can be defined brand as “the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its target consumers” (Thakor, 1996).

2.2.1. Brand origin cues and origin recognition accuracy

As discussed earlier, country image effects consumers’ perceptions of a brand, as they tend to associate the brand to a certain origin. The country image acts as an umbrella brand (Hsieh et al., 2004) and has several characteristics that people draw information from as they form the image of that particular country (i.e. Kotler et al., 2002). However, it has become harder for the consumers to associate a product or a brand solely to one origin as manufacturing, design, assembly and management can all be located in different countries (Thakor et al., 2003) and consumers might not possess the accurate origin information (i.e. Samiee et. al, 2005). Thus, the role of the location of the corporate ownership has become more influential as an origin cue for the brand since this information is often more available (Lim et al. 2001).

The country image is transferred to a product or a brand through the location associations consumers possess. The country of origin affects consumer perceptions and behaviours through the image of the brand’s origin (Aiello et al., 2009). Thakor et al. (2003) propose there to be several antecedents of brand origin from which consumers might draw brand origin cues. These are location of ownership, manufacture, assembly, origin of top management, marketing communications and other clues (press reports etc.). With this, the traditional view of country of origin, where the origin is viewed as the place of manufacturing, is coming progressively deceiving as design, manufacturing and assembling happen all in different countries (Chao, 1993; see Lim et al. 2001). From these a perceived brand origin is created leading to more general perception, expectations about the brand (Thakor et al., 2003). The link to a certain origin can be formed through several promotional activities or through brand name in two different manners: by pronunciation or by linking

the brand to a certain city or a region (e.g. Philadelphia cheese) (Thakor et al., 2003). Furthermore, it could be stated that the link can be formed through various intrinsic and extrinsic cues as well that are subtler in their way of expressing the origin information (i.e. images, design, narratives).

As it has become more common to have several origins, there has been a shift to perceive the origin as the place of the brand origin. The traditional view of country of origin seems to be placed by brand origin (BO), as it is increasingly difficult for consumers to derive from the multiplicity of country information of a product. Furthermore, BO information is more accessible to consumers as a consequent of exposure to the marketing activities of the brand. (Lim et al. 2001). Similarly, Thakor et al. (2003) found that when consumers recognize the country of corporate ownership or this information is clearly provided, this is considered to play a more important role in the evaluation of brand perceptions than the country of manufacturing or assembly. However, they imply that further studies should be made to reinforce these results. The linkage of brand origin to the headquarters of the parent firm is a quite valid perspective: even though some products are produced and acquired from various locations, they will still represent a single image and home country identity (Samiee et al., 2005). Lim et al. (2001) suggest that BO offers a perspective to understanding how consumers perceive and evaluate brands. As the global markets are well intertwined, the cultural dimension will increasingly play an important role on how consumers absorb information about brand's origin. (Lim et al. 2001). Where a large part of the previous CO research has focused on how consumers perceive almost solely the quality of a product in terms of its origin, the notion of brand origin refers to the integration of origin cues within the brand image (Thakor, 1996). In other words, the previous research has had its focus on how consumers evaluate single products based on the origin of their manufacturing whereas the notion of brand origin includes the origin associations on the corporate brand level, from which they are likely to affect everything related to the brand.

While the country image and brand origin play an important role on consumers perceptions of a brand, the perceptions of the origin might not be

accurate. As mentioned beforehand, there might be several country images that consumers can associate the brand with that in the worst case could be contradictory with each other. If the different origins are common knowledge to consumers, the image they form about that brand might not be coherent. In example, if a design lamp is designed in Italy, a country know for its high quality design and craftsmanship, but the lamp is manufactured in India, a country known for cheap labour and mass-production, consumers might be confused about these contradictory associations they link to that particular product and brand.

Having several origin cues is not the only reason for consumers to possess inaccurate origin information. There are several reasons for the dislocation of the origin that Samiee et al. (2005) have dived into different scenarios of recognition accuracy. Samiee et al. (2005) suggest if brand origin has an important role on how consumers judge and make decisions in their everyday life, it would be presumed that they would hold somewhat reasonably accurate abilities to identify brands' country of origin. However, consumer perceptions of the brand origin may differ from the reality by reason of ignorance, lack of importance of the origin information for a specific brand, or deliberate blurring by companies concerned about their likely unfavorable origin (Thakor, 1996). Thakor (1996) also suggests that consumers might be aware of the country of manufacturing but still perceive the origin to be the place of brand origin. Similarly to Thakor, Samiee et. al. (2005) introduce the notion of brand origin recognition accuracy (BORA) that is the form of knowledge consumers have stored in memory that they can retrieve as an influential factor when forming brand-related judgments and making choices.

According to Samiee et al. (2005), there are four different scenarios for pertaining BORA. First, consumers can hold accurate brand origin information in their memory, and thus they link brands to their respective countries. Second, consumers might be entirely ignorant of the brand origin, which leads to the situation where consumers pay no attention to brand-origin-related information in their choice making. Third, brand origin might be inaccurately perceived and used in the evaluative process. This could be due

to marketers' proactive branding strategies, but also in the worst case unintentional. Finally, the most difficult case is, where consumers link the brand to various origins, and when at the same time this information plays a role in their choice behavior. (Samiee et al., 2005).

It should be noted that not all consumers evaluate brands in a similar matter. Samiee et al. (2005) found that socioeconomic status, international experience and low ethnocentrism influence the brand origin recognition accuracy. Thus, it could be argued since design products are often more high end products, they are more likely to be bought by wealthier consumers who in accordance with the mentioned findings might be aware of the respective brand origin of the design brands.

Consumers link some origin information to brand new to them, either positive or negative and it can have various effects on brand. This information can be deliberate from the marketers' side or consumers can have acquired it elsewhere. When new brands are launched they are most likely associated with a certain brand origin by consumers. From the beginning, consumers attach the brand to a country and afterwards may refer to this while evaluating the brand. (Koubaa, 2008). The associated country image is either an asset or a liability depending on whether it is considered to be positive or negative (Lambert et al. 1998). In order to be effective, the desired country image needs to be close to reality, simple, appealing and distinctive (Kotler et. al. 2002). Successful global marketing demands that the core brand associations remain consistent across international markets and that these remain positive. Positive national characteristic can be utilized in global marketing as long as it is recognized that the overall country image affects consumer behaviour and cannot be controlled by the brand. (Hsieh et al., 2005).

This kind of brand knowledge can be emphasized by marketers in their means to link brands with positive country images. However, consumers can acquire these also independently by experiencing the marketplace, hearing word-of-mouth information and by acquiring first-hand brand information. (Samiee et al., 2005). Besides the country origin as an informational cue, in

the real decision-making environment consumers derive information also from other extrinsic and intrinsic cues (Agrawal et. al., 1999). The perceived origin information at the decision-making environment could be strengthened i.e. with stores' aesthetical design and with package design. Thus, marketers should closely evaluate what are the various elements that consumers draw origin information from and how these could be managed in favour of the brand. Koubaa (2008) suggests that the companies should consider how much emphasis they want to put on the origin information, if the outcomes on brand image could be negative. Furthermore, marketing activities should be customized to suite each brand, country and brand-country combinations.

2.2.2. Brand evaluations based on origin perceptions

As consumers link a brand to a certain origin the country image creates particular associations, such as the level of quality and price expectations, which further on create expectations about that brand and thus a basis for brand evaluations. Generally, brands are evaluated partly based on the perceived origin.

Kotler et al. (2002) state that studies consistently support the fact that consumers use origin information to assess quality. Since there is a strong link between the country image and product quality in relation to product and brand evaluations (Kotler et al., 2002), it is essential to distinguish how consumers perceive the redefined concept of country of origin (Aiello et al., 2009). From the different antecedents a perceived brand origin is created leading to more general perception, expectations about the brand. More specifically these are perceptions of quality, perceived dimensions of quality, brand-related attitudes, price-expectations, perceived value and purchase intentions. (Thakor et al., 2003). In general, products from undeveloped and emerging economies are perceived deteriorative to products from developed countries (Lim et al. 2001). The link between quality and the country of origin

is vital in the case of high design products such as luxury items. According to Jackson & Shaw (2009, 122-123), the country of origin is a key feature consumers look for in a luxury product. Especially, when the heritage and craftsmanship are essential parts of the brand. On contrary, mass-produced fashion items aren't evaluated on the same basis and the country of origin information does not have the same weight in the evaluation process of a brand as it does when it comes to luxury items. (Jackson et. al. 2009, 122-123). Thus, it could be said that the evaluation of the quality is dependable on the product category. Hui et al. (2003) note that many researchers have found that as extrinsic cues, brand name plays a more important role than the country-of-manufacture in defining quality judgement.

The effects of brand origin depend both on the country and the product category that the brand belongs to and on the relationship between these two. The qualitative perceptions become positive when a connection between the country of brand origin and the brand is recognized. The COO effect is both country specific and product category specific (Lambert et al. 1998). This means that in those product categories where a particular country is highly viewed as a producer of a certain product, consumers are especially evaluative of the brand origin when making decisions regarding products in a specific category (Samiee et al. 2005). In example, Italy is highly viewed as a producer of quality design whereas Poland is not. Thus, it is likely that consumers evaluate design from Italy more favorable than design items from Poland. However, in other product categories that do not have such a strong tie to a certain country such as books, the origin does not play an important role in the consumers' evaluation process.

Roth et al. (1992) suggest that perceptions of a country's production and marketing strengths and weaknesses are taken into account when country's products are being evaluated. The country image created by marketing may have been formed from certain attributes highlighted by various different brands or the marketing conducted by authorities of that country. Furthermore, the products of that country shape the perceptions consumers possess. Other brands originating from the same country can affect consumers' formation of a picture of that particular country, creating

intangible assets or liabilities in consumers' minds (Kim and Chung, 1997: 367; see Pappu, 2007). Lambert et al. (1998) note that a country's product category is assessed on the basis of its real and observed value, when an individual possess a higher familiarity with that country's product category. According to Roth et al. (1992), when the strengths of the country are also important product features, a favorable or consistent product-country match occurs. Similarly, Haubl and Helrod (1999; see Aiello et al., 2009) noted that when consumers recognize the unity between the brand and the country of production, the qualitative perceptions of that brand's products become positive. In example for a wine the taste and quality are important product features while France is perceived as a famous wine producer. It can be said that in this case a consistent product-country match occurs. Marketers should evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their brand origin's image and whether the current image is consistent with their own brand. It could be advisable to assess whether to highlight the brand origin information or to diminish this in brand identity management in order to avoid inconsistencies that may confuse consumers and result in unfavorable brand image.

When perceived origin or national identity is unusually important in a certain product category for the brand image, many brands use cues to imply their origin associations in their brand name or in promotional appeals (Thakor et al., 2003). The strongest effect of product image is likely to be among high prestige consumer goods. The high differentiation products are ones for which consumers are willing to pay a high premium based on the perceived extensive differences between brands i.e. luxury goods, interior design etc. (Lambert et al., 1998). Similarly, Gürhan-Canli et al. (2000a, b; see Thakor et al., 2003) imply that foreign origin appears to be important for hedonistic products such as fashion and design.

The importance of the brand-country relationship should be well evaluated when making decisions concerning this relationship that may affect the brand image. Furthermore, the strength and importance of the relationship does not play similarly important role for all brands. Pappu et. al. (2007) suggest, that companies should understand these relationships before moving the production to another country, since changes in these may affect the brand

and the brand equity is a valuable asset and holds a source of a competitive advantage (Aaker, 1991; see Pappu et al. 2007). Similarly, Hui et al. (2003), state that any notable effect of country of manufacture information can be caused by the incongruence between the countries of manufacture and brand origin, if the effect of brand origin information for the brand is not controlled. However, also the strength of the tie between brand and the brand-origin has an impact on the erosion when shifting the production to another country (Koubaa, 2008). In his study, Koubaa (2008) found brand image to be multidimensional rather than an overall concept. Furthermore, his study revealed brand image structures to be significantly different across brands and across countries of production. In fact, the origin structure may not be that straightforward or the image formed in consumers' minds may have ignored some origin information. Many brands originating from countries known for being manufactures of certain product categories are made in other countries with less reputable images (Hui et al., 2003). Similarly, Koubaa (2008) noted that many products have an inconsistency between the brand origin and the country of origin, as the product is not manufactured in the country where the brand is perceived to belong by consumers. This might not be a disadvantage for all brands. When the brand origin information is more dominant for the consumers than the production origin and the country of production is not important for the brand identity. High-street fashion brand Zara is considered to be Spanish even though its clothes are produced to a large extends in countries with cheaper labour. Since the most important factor in consumers' minds is not the high quality rather than fashionability, this does not affect the brand image. Furthermore, it could be argued that consumers are well aware of the fact that most of the mass produced fashion items are produced in countries where labour is cheap. Contradictory, for a fashion brand that the country of production is a core competitive advantage, especially for most of the luxury brands, the production origin plays an important role. I.e. Chanel's clothes are hand-made in France and the craftsmanship is an important advantage for their brand. The brand image would most likely be damaged if the production would be moved to India. In cases where the manufacture decides to move the production of their high equity brand to a low cost country, all salient

brand associations apart from the brand origin should be strengthened and underlined in order to minimize the negative effects of foreign production (Hui et al., 2003). Koubaa (2008) states that depending on the familiarity of a brand the effects of COO have different effects on brand image perception. Well known brands face more erosion when the production is moved from the country of brand-origin to another country. However, unknown brands may gain from being produced in their country of brand-origin if the country is famous as a producer of that particular product. (Koubaa, 2008). In example, Italy is viewed as a quality manufacturer of shoes. A small producer of shoes in Italy might gain positive leverage from the brand origin when this is highlighted in international markets.

Some factors may moderate the effects of the origin information in the evaluation process of a brand such as previous experience and familiarity with a country's products. Also, a famous brand might be evaluated differently based on its CO than an unfamiliar brand would be. The effects also vary between individuals and countries. The differences in country origin effects can be found over product categories and within categories depending on the brand and an individual product (Labert et al., 1998). Lambert et al. (1998) state that previous experiences and an overall familiarity with a country's products decrease the effects of CO. This is illustrated by three different situations. First, an individual has no experience with the product, but has generated an overall country image. This image is in this case transferred to the specific product category (Erickson et al., 1994; see Lambert et al., 1998). This is called the "halo effect". In international marketing, a country's halo effect means how its products are rated based on observed ability to produce specific products. Second, an individual has previous experiences with a brand originating from a specific country. In this case, the product image of the product new to the consumer is to a great extent shaped by the perceived benefits of that familiar brand and the country image may not play any role in the evaluations. Third, an individual has tried several brands originating from a country. Thus, the product image is based on multiple brand familiarity, which shapes an individual's subjective assessment of the country's products. In the last scenario, an individual is

most likely to evaluate the product by its real and perceived value. (Lambert et al.,1998). When a brand has achieved high success and has become an entity in itself, the CO effect might not play such an important role anymore. Thus, the brand may not suffer from the shift of production to another country, as customers may still view the brand to be “made in” in the original country due to its strong brand image. (Lambert et al.,1998). In example, BMW has a strong image of being a German automobile brand. It has maintained this image even though it has moved a great part of its manufacturing to India, Malaysia, Indonesia etc. Both brand and country reputation tone down the effect of country image on brand image (Hui et al., 2003). That is to say the brand image of a famous brand of a certain product category origin from a country that is well known as a manufacturer of those products is evaluated differently from a famous brand origin from an unknown country, and the other way around (Koubaa, 2008). In addition, it should be noted that consumers differ from each other in how much emphasis they place on CO information (Samiee et al., 2005). Furthermore, there might be varying images for the products of a certain country across other countries (Lambert et al., 1998). In addition, Agrawal et al. (1999) criticize previous finding not to take into account other information influencing behavioral intentions. They state that CO information plays a smaller role when the actual purchase situation comes closer.

As noted before, brands and products from a country affect the image of that country. It could be said the brand-country image works in a two-way relationship. In their study, Lambert et al. (1998) suggest that there are two-way interactions between brand and country images, and the perceived attributes of products associated with the specific brand and the country of origin. Similarly, Pappu et. al. (2007), propose there to be a bidirectional relationship between country image and brand image. This is also illustrated by the before mentioned “halo-effect” (Labert et al., 1998). A country’s product image is a dynamic process over time, as consumers become more familiar with the brands from that country and at the same time might gain more knowledge of the country itself (Lambert et al., 1998). According to Lambert et al. (1998), it is characteristic in international marketing that when

a brand originating from a country penetrates to a foreign market, other brands from the same country, and often from the same market segment, tend to follow. However, each of these brands should possess unique brand attributes in order to gain differential advantage. With different brands a question arises how these different images are reflected in CO image. (Lambert et al. 1998). Lambert et al. (1998) propose the concept of image crystallization. Crystallization means the scope to which country image is shaped into a consistent and integrated structure. This can be gained by preserving one or more important characteristics of the country's image, while maintaining the brand individuality at the same time. (Lambert et al., 1998). If consumers hold a positive product-country image, this image could turn into a more generalized positive attitude towards all the brands from other categories associated with that country (Agrawal et. al., 1999). When consumers have once created positive associations towards a particular country, they are more likely to have positive expectations towards also other products originating from that country.

3. Origin cue transfer through visual appeals in international fashion advertisement

This chapter will look into the previous literature related to origin cues in advertising and how these are transferred to consumers through the visual appeals in international fashion advertising. The first subchapter will focus on how origin cues are communicated through international advertising, and has a special focus on the specific challenges that international markets create. In the second subchapter the visual appeals in fashion advertising will be discussed. Furthermore, how consumers interpret the visual appeals in international fashion advertisement will be explored.

Creating a brand image can happen through variety of media. Communication comprehends all contact points between the brand and the audience. (Aaker et al., 2002, 42). Marketing communications consist of advertising, sponsorship, public relations, point-of-purchase communications, exhibitions and trade fairs, direct marketing communications, personal selling and e-communications (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007). As the field of marketing communications is rather vast, it is not possible to concentrate on all of these in a research of this width. In thesis, the focus will be in advertising since traditionally advertising has been the primary method of communicating brand image (Jackson et al., 2009, 161). When communicating, each time we finish with saying much more than we believe to do. All kind of communication implicitly tells something about the sender, the source the receiver and the relationship that are attempted to create between the two. (Kapferer, 2004, 121).

In the field of fashion, marketing communication tools are utilized in a slightly different manner as much more emphasis has been placed on PR and visual merchandising. (Jackson et al., 2009, 156). However, advertising has an important role on building a brand image even on the field of fashion. The ability of advertising in creating powerful images and messages across media has allowed brands to gain consumers' attention (Jackson et al., 2009,

161). Visualisations are especially important in fashion, which is of aesthetic nature.

3.1. *Origin cues in international advertising*

This subchapter will examine how the origin cues are communicated through international advertising. The first section will focus on the ways origin cues can be embedded in advertising. In the second section the special challenges that international markets pose to advertising will be examined.

De Pelsmacker et al. (2007) define advertising as the “*non-personal mass communication using mass media (such as TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards etc.), the content of which is determined and paid for by a clearly identified sender (the company)*”. Advertising is the most visible tool of the marketing communications mix, thus it is frequently perceived as a synonym of marketing communications. (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007). In this thesis, the focus will be on printed advertisement as it is probably the most common form of advertising in fashion and a great means to communicate visual images. Furthermore, the advantage of print ads in magazines is that they have a long life, as they are, especially the high-end magazines, forwarded to friends or saved as prestige coffee-table items (Jackson et al., 2009, 164). However, this means also that consumers return to the ads over and over again, thus, these ads should be able to convey the same meanings throughout the time. In addition, editorial fashion articles are vital in fashion and regular advertisement in a magazine can help the brand’s inclusion in editorial fashion comments (Jackson et al., 2009, 163).

3.1.1. Origin cues in advertising

Countries of origin are considerable cultural reservoir for brands, and are communicated through products and advertising. With culture is referred to the set of values that the brands drive their inspiration from. Brand culture

differentiates brand from others and indicates the characteristic values that are embodied in the brand's products. This aspect differentiates luxury brands the most as the brand culture refers to their roots and fundamental values. (Kapferer, 2004.108-109). Many of the luxury brands have their roots in the special craftsmanship of their countries of origin. In example, Louis Vuitton in the beginning made travel luggage for the French aristocrats. Thus, from the beginning LV has had a strong linkage to the high-society of France. As discussed before, allusion to a certain origin may also enhance the quality aspects of that particular country. A reference through advertising to an expertise that is associated with certain origin thereby generates confidence in that particular brand (Head, 1988).

Origin cues are often drawn from advertising, which is probably the most visible part of the brand communications and key tool for narrative creation. Any type of communication implies something about the sender and the source. All brands obtain a history, a culture a personality and a reflection through their cumulative communications, no matter whether they are managed or not, or planned or wanted. (Kapferer, 2004, 121). Advertising plays a key role in driving the flow of cultural forms and meanings through narrative-based and image centred descriptions (Archpru et al., 2004). Most often brands create myths through advertising from which consumers come to perceive the myth assimilated in the brand's products. When buying the product, consumers consider themselves as a part of the myth and creating a relationship with the brand. (Holt, 2003).

Reference to an origin may be also subtle without any clear direction to the origin. Thakor (1996) states that origin cues in advertisements may not be clear to consumers at the first sight; they might seem not related to the origin at all. This kind of cues may be used to fortify feature-based claims and to bring in mind meanings pertinent to concept-based claims. (Thakor, 1996). Similarly to Thakor, Liu (2005) suggests that acknowledge of the automatic country stereotypes stored in consumers' memory may be activated spontaneously through exposure to an origin cue without any conscious effort to reach them. The country stereotype is activated through an exposure to origin information and its effect on brand evaluation may be unintentional

(Liu, 2005). This is beneficial to the brand if the country stereotype is positive. Positive cues in an ad create positive response in the consumer who attaches this positive sense to the advertised brand (Philips et al., 2010).

Country stereotypes can change the brand evaluations when consumer has information sufficiently of the origin. When the brand origin is viewed favourably, the advertising strategy should create and strengthen the memory representation of the brand in such a manner that both the controlled remembrance of brand attributes and the country stereotype that is automatically activated should enhance the same image, not two different types of country images. (Liu, 2005). Liu suggests that the origin information may play a more important role than traditionally has been thought and detected. However, Samiee et al. (2005) found that consumers' brand origin recognition is modest at best. Thus, they state that international marketing strategies should focus more on other brand attributes than those related to brand origins. (Samiee et al. 2005). Nevertheless, it could be argued that in the case of luxury brands, a reference to an origin is beneficial as consumers familiar with luxury brands are most likely to be aware of the brand origin since it is often a vital part of the brand identity and image.

Brand associations to an origin are a strong source of brand appeal and they are used largely in advertising (Thakor et al., 2003). Brand's heritage may be inextricably tied with brand origin, as a heritage is rather difficult to devise without accompanying image of a particular place. Developing a brand image that incorporates elements of heritage and authenticity is vital for successful brands. Authenticity and integrity are likely to attract today's consumers and brand heritage is one of the most precious assets in creating an image of these. (Ballantyne et al., 2006). According to Kapferer (2004, 121), the history of a brand is written by advertising.

Most often the appeal of heritage is created through appeals of i.e. money, authority and nonconformity. In the fashion sector, consumers' quest for authenticity of late has made way for the revival of i.e. British heritage brands such as Burberry. The advertising campaigns of these brands have referred

to aristocratic images such as fashion shoots in privileged country houses. (Mintell, 2001; see Ballantyne et al., 2006). Macrae (1996; see Ballantyne et al., 2006) argue that for distinguished brands the notion of heritage has become more and more important and the history with the brand's consumption meanings increase the communication power of the brand. The heritage is implicitly communicated through the brand communications and is perceived as part of the brand image. Kuruc (2008) states fashion to be an effective tool for communicating multiple messages about particular cultures since portrayal and identification with specific groups happens on a visual level. Fashion acts as a guide to several histories, events and struggles of certain eras. (Kuruc, 2008). The differing cultural backgrounds are visible i.e. in the case of luxury brands. According to Kapferer (2006), luxury fashion brands differ from each other whether originating from Europe or the United States. In Europe, brands like Yves Saint Laurent and Dior are formed around ideas of history, artisanship and art that are prevalent subjects in Western Europe. In the U.S. brands like Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger reflect the core of American culture that are heroic, personal stories. (Kapferer, 2006).

The origin cues in advertising should be used when they match with the country origin of their brand and provide cues only of one origin. Origin cues can be communicated through advertising in varying ways either directly or in a more implicit manner. Direct references to an origin may be formed i.e. through a straightforward "made in claims" or through the endorser's (the celebrity spokesperson or a model) ethnicity among others. According to Head (1988), through the "made in " advertising slogans foreign audiences' attention is directed towards the positive and most often stereotypical attributes of another country and the advertised brand originating from that country is diffused with these image-enhancing qualities. Also the endorser's ethnicity may give clues of the advertiser's origin. As a consumer sees an ad, the most common expectation is that the endorser's ethnic background are the same as the product's origin and this type of connection might speak in favour of the brand. (Ryu et al., 2006). Ryu et al. (2006) note, that in case of hedonic product, the endorser's ethnicity that is similar to the consumer's

origin exhibited more positive responses towards ads, independent of the product's origin. This is an interesting claim, as in many Asian countries new high-end consumers are nowadays often idealizing the Western culture and brands with heritage. This is especially the case with luxury brands that are referring to their heritage through their advertising and most commonly using Western models and celebrity endorsers. Zou et al. (2010) state that global consumers prefer the same brands, and similar product features and functionalities in increasing matter.

3.1.2. International advertising

The main purpose of international marketing communications is to communicate with the international target customers and position the brand within the selected international markets (Wong et al., 2008). Advertising in international markets requires some special consideration as the same brand may attain incompatible shared meanings in different markets (Kates et Goh, 2003). There has been a longstanding debate between two different approaches to international marketing communications: adaptation and standardization (An, 2007). Arguments favouring adaptation are mainly based on the way various consumers in different cultures differ in evaluating brand meanings (Archpru et al. 2004). Standardization is asserted with a unified brand image throughout global markets. Furthermore, new technologies and media pose some challenges, to international positioning, especially for adaptation strategies.

A global consumer culture has emerged with globalization, which poses some challenges to international advertising. Alden et al. (1999) define this as *“a set of consumption-related symbols and behaviours that are commonly understood but not necessarily shared by consumers and businesses around the world”*. The major consequence of the emerging global markets is that marketers need to deploy their international marketing strategies to correspond characteristics of diverse external environments. (Wong et al., 2007). When moving to global markets, marketers continuously encounter

the issue of how to create consistent brand image across the globe despite cultural differences (Park et al., 2009). According to Archpru et al. (2010), consumers comprehend global consumer culture signs and behaviours but constantly count on their own local meaning systems for interpretation, use and expression. What is considered “global” in a culture is relative to what is perceived as “local” in the same culture (Archpru et al. 2004).

Consumers differing understanding of signs affect the way visuals in international advertising are executed. Hsieh et al. (2005) propose that brand image is perceived differently in different cultures as needs and wants of consumers vary. Even though emotions might be universal, different cultures place different emphasis on these. Thus, the same emotional construct may be represented differently in different cultures. As a consequence, the same emotional message is communicated using very different advertising executions. Without affecting the core brand identity, the message is modified to convey the same meaning in different cultures and impact on consumers. (Hsieh et al., 2005).

Besides being multi-faced, cultures are very dynamic. The meaning of an object of a symbol may change as cultural forms or symbols move to a new culture. Even though products sold in different cultures may be similar, buying motives may be differing across consumer segments and cultures. (Archpru et al., 2010). Depending on the receiver, the message communicated through advertising can be decoded in different ways and furthermore, reacted to in varying manners. In example, the act of owning a product from a certain luxury brand may differ broadly according to social class and culture. The ownership of a luxury product can result in feelings of prestige, integrity and worth, or in feelings of stupidity and vanity. (Jackson et al., 2009, 159).

Since the brand image is held and created by consumers through the interplay of the brand communications and consumers’ thoughts, some localization is always needed in the execution of brand communications (Hsieh et al., 2005). Even though some signs can be positioned constantly across cultures, their relevance and significance may vary (Archpru et al.,

2010). Wong et al. (2008) suggest that international marketing communications are more effective if the brand is adjusted to suit the characteristic of the foreign markets. Similarly Park et al. (2009) argue that localized branding content responding to consumers' different levels of consumption values in different countries would be effective for constructing a uniform brand image across nations. The basis for creating a local relevance and the ways brands might transubstantiate into the new local is provided by sociocultural meanings (Archpru et al., 2010). However, Hsieh et al. (2005) conclude that despite the universality of the core brand image, with too much notion on the local specifics there is a risk of losing the brand image ending up with consumer rejection of the brand. Furthermore, it could be argued that the understanding of the deeply embedded cultural signs is complex process and the adaptation to each culture requires resources from the company.

Another international branding issue closely related to adaption strategy is brand repositioning. (Wong et al., 2007). A brand alters and changes its nature when it leaves its country of brand origin. Kapferer (2004, 429) argues that exported brands need to be positioned at the higher price categories, as they have to cover transport costs and custom duties. In example littala's dishes are sold also in some supermarkets besides their own stores and shop in shops in Finland. Since Finland is littala's brand origin and the brand has achieved a status as a national icon, the quality perception as such does not alter depending on the place of purchase. However, in international markets, littala's products are sold mostly only in high-end department stores and in their own, very good looking stores. In these markets littala has positioned itself in the high end. Positioning a global brand in a local market can be done also with the choice of a specific media rather than localizing the visual or narrative story. In example, in China, certain magazines are more effective in reaching the status-seeking consumers than TV or some other magazines. (Archpru et al., 2010). This is most likely the case in all countries. Each magazine has a certain reputation and consumers are most likely to possess a certain image in their minds about the readers of specific magazines. The associations of the readers are likely to be linked to some

extend to the advertised brand, as consumer, even unconsciously, perceive the ad to be targeted to a certain kind of reader. In example, an ad published in Finnish Seiska or in Gloria is probably evaluated differently.

With globalizing markets, having localization strategies face some challenges and the standardization strategy might gain more justification. According to Park et al. (2009) a strong and consistent global brand image might be one of the core assets of a global brand that has a valuable meaning for the company's successful global market expansion. The development of international media provides greater opportunities for a single brand (Kapferer, 2004. 402), as consumers around the world are consuming the same media. Similarly, with developed tourism, consumers are introduced to international media in larger extends. It could be suggested, that with this, consumers across cultures are exposed to similar images that modify the interpretation of signs and meanings to a more unified direction. Cayla et al. (2008) argue that common ways to perceive brands in today's world are closely tied to the Western "imagery" of marketing. With imagery is referred to *the values, institutions and symbols common to marketing as discipline and form of discourse* (Cayla et al., 2008).

Global marketing strategies should focus on the common values associated with the brand instead of adapting to specific consumer cultures. The brand can be established as global by using certain story themes and visual images across markets. (Tharp et al., 2001). Zou et al. (2010) state that especially in fashion-driven industries it is critical to create and sustain a global brand, in which, global advertising plays an essential role. In reality, many luxury brands have achieved a worldwide appeal. According to Kapferer (2004, 409), they carry a message, as each designer is expressing their own personal values. The designer's identity and values expressed create an instinctive basis for the brand's identity, no matter where in the world. Generally, brands that have their roots as a focus of their identity can more easily go global. When a brand is created around a cultural stereotype, the stereotype referred to is a collective symbol that breaks national ties. (Kapferer, 2004, 409-410). However, Hsieh et al. (2005) state that absolute standardization is never achievable as individual markets vary significantly in

forms of language, media availability and many other matters affecting the marketing strategy. In contrast firms are investing a lot of money in brand development, which directs towards a standardized approach (Hsieh et al., 2005). Furthermore, Hsieh et al. (2005), criticize even the linkage to origin in brand communications by stating that there is a risk that a marketing strategy will fail, when the brand image is too tied to a certain culture, no matter how well adapted to local

Hsieh et al. (2005) suggest, that the scope of how similarly or differently people perceive an existing brand image around the globe, may dictate the relationship between standardization and customization of an international brand image strategy. Global brand advertising may gain most from a combined or hybrid approach. This kind of advertising should present globally desired attributes such as quality and prestige while deploying consumer preferences for global versus local signs in the choice of language, visual and themes. (Archpru et al., 2010). Archpru et al. (2010) continue by stating that this is a complex field and further studies on balancing the standardized and localized attributes and symbols in international advertising are needed.

3.2. Cue transfer through visual appeals in fashion advertisement

This subchapter will discuss how different cues are communicated through the visual appeals in fashion advertisement and furthermore, how these are interpreted by consumers. The first section will examine the importance of visual appeals in fashion advertisement. In the second section, the ways of how consumers interpret the visual appeals of ads will be discussed.

3.2.1. Visual appeals in fashion advertisement

Contemporary culture is becoming more and more visual, where consumers are searching experiences through visual images among others. Visual appeal is also the most significant aspect of an advertising message (An, 2007). This is especially important for fashion brands that are of aesthetic nature. Visual appeals are an important part of the communication processes since they are used to direct attention and create curiosity (Hecker & Stewart 1988; Wells et al. 2003; Moriarty 1997; see An, 2007). In postmodern society, people are captivated by signs, which results in that they live in a world where signs and images are more important than what they stand for. As a result, contemporary consumers consume imagery, not concentrating on what the images represent or mean (Atwall et al., 2009). While traditional marketing focusing concentrated on utilitarian features and benefits of products, experiential marketing considers consumers emotional, concentrating on attaining pleasurable experiences (Atwal et al., 2009). According to Aaker et al. (2000), visual imagery is much more influential than verbal communication in impacting on consumers' perception and memory. A great example of the visualizing consumer culture are arising visual social medias such as Pinterest and Instagram.

According to Ballantyne et al. (2006) contemporary society is image-based and visually-led where visually striking brands are more likely to catch consumers' attention. A great deal of contemporary magazine advertisement is visually rich, layered and obscure (Bulmer et al., 2006). Besides informational reasons, consumers expose themselves to media content for hedonic reasons, often intentionally (Martin et al., 2011). Philips et al. (2010) suggest that fashion ads provide pleasure and affirmative emotions. Fashion ads are not plainly serving as sources of product information, but are consumed as such. What differentiates fashion ads from the ads of other hedonic products' ads (i.e. sports cars), is that they omit text elements and consist most often only of branded imagery. (Philips et al., 2010). Consumers can use fashion images to envision an ideal consumption world, a lifestyle that is not currently achievable (Thompson et al., 1997).

Ads are not just expeditions for defining identity or stimuli for social comparison; they can take the manifestation of masquerade (Philips et al., 2010). Ad imagery offers an occasion for consumers to develop a story. As consumers create a story based on their own image associations, the brand story becomes part of their own story and the brand experience intensifies. (Philips et al., 2010). According to Kapferer et al. (2009), stories construct an appealing identity and produce emotional involvement. Often, fashion ads include elements that permit consumers to perform a narrative (Philips et al., 2010). In example, in one of the Yves Saint Lauren's ads a woman crawling on a roof is pictured. Obviously, it is not meant that YSL's clothes are for the specific use of crawling, but rather consumers might draw other clues from the ad that allow them to perform a narrative i.e. through associations to other stories like in this case possibly to the cat woman, who is strong and independent. Fashion ads are not effectively theorized if they are treated as signs from which meanings are to be read off by consumers (Philips et al., 2010) By seizing fashion discourse, consumers create personalized fashion narratives (Thompson et al., 1997).

Consumers may not be performing a narrative only through narrative transportation (creating stories around the models and other objects in the ad); instead, they may be transported into a story world through immersion in the work of art, such the ad can be perceived as (Philips et al., 2010). Ad imagery is consumed as an enjoyable viewing experience, as an artwork itself. The aesthetic immersion occurs by medium of the brand's ad. Like fashion clothing can be considered offering sensory pleasures, it is logical, that the ads communicating these brands do so likewise. (Philips et al., 2010). In contemporary society, there is a need for a shift away from the traditional approaches to marketing that advocate a features-and benefits approach, and move to creating consumer experiences (Atwal et al., 2009). Especially in luxury goods segments, traditional marketing concentrating on product features does not apply and in successful marketing activities the traditional marketing practices are turned upside down (Kapferer et al., 2009). When it comes to luxury goods, most of brands' activities are of an aesthetic nature where consumers immerse themselves in the experience. It

is increasingly important to design innovative experiences in luxury marketing. (Atwal et al., 2009). According to Kapferer et al. (2009), luxury should have exceptionally strong hedonistic and personal elements, or it can no longer be perceived as luxury but snobbery.

The artfulness of the image as a whole is what makes the ad adequately intense to create the immersion response that is associated with the “high” art found in museums. In order for a consumer to experience the sublime, the ad may have to include some grotesque elements. Since fashion ads most often do not contain words, the pathos that is important in order to experience the sublime is hard to create in print ads. Without something similar to the pathos, ads are often just pretty pictures trying to sell something; they do not convey anything that would create grand feelings in consumers. Pretty models, splendid surroundings and spectacular clothes are not enough to trigger engagement in consumers and produce immersion. (Philips et al., 2010). Creating images in consumers’ minds depends on how different advertising appeals are used (Park et al., 2009), as they affect how consumers interpret the advertising.

3.2.2. Interpreting fashion advertisements’ visual appeals

The way the brand image structure is formed is influenced by the delivered advertising message and the meaning interpreted by consumers (Hsieh et al. 2005). Not all terms and signs are interpreted similarly by consumers. Knowledge of these depends on knowledge of the system to which they belong to, and a sign or a term makes sense only through comparison with and distinction from other signs and terms. (Cayla et al., 2008). What a consumer extracts from the ad is more important for its effect than the intended message (Ketelaar et al., 2012). Similarly Usunier (2000; see Bulmer et al., 2006) states that, while pictures are understood all over the world, the issue rises of how they are understood.

From the brand’s point of view, an important advertising effect is a logical

interpretation by consumers (Morgan et al., 1999). However, a single picture may encompass several highly sophisticated interrelated signs and numerous levels of meanings. This complexity will lead to a state where the interpretation of an ad is contingent on changes in substance and depth. (Bulmer et al., 2006). The interpretation may lead either to incomprehension and negative feelings, or to a positive outcome. If the ad is incomprehended, this might lead to negative feelings toward the ad and thus the brand, or to no feelings if the ad is skipped by consumers as incomprehensible (Ketelaar et al., 2012). Nevertheless, a visual that elicits a positive affective reaction can add meaning and subsequently evoke a positive response to the ad (An, 2007).

Visuals convey different kinds of meanings. Moriarty (1987) categorized visual appeals into two categories: literal and symbolic. Literal visuals are used to communicate fact-based information to identify brands, portray product details, make comparisons with competitors, and demonstrate how products work. Symbolic visuals on the other hand communicate abstract images through associations, metaphors, narratives and aesthetics. (see; An, 2007). According to Thakor (1996), the usage of origin cues differs significantly across abstract and specific features based appeals. When the brand image reckons on a symbolic concept, the origin cues will be subtle and implicit without any straight origin-based claim. This is the case i.e. with luxury fashion brands. Implicit uses of origin cues in advertising may include subtle styling, pronunciation, urban vs. rural names etc. (Thakor, 1996). Somewhat similarly to Moriarty, Ketelaar et al. (2012) use the term ad openness to refer to the quantity of guidance towards a planned interpretation. If an ad has one or more of the succeeding characteristic a dominant visual, little or no verbal information, and visual figures, the ad can be described generally open. All verbal elements may restrict the interpretation of an image as texts guide receivers towards certain elements and interpretations of an ad. Without verbal elements, consumers have more choices for choosing an interpretation, as there is no verbal element directing towards a meaning decided on in advance. (Ketelaar et al., 2012). Abstract metaphors are interpreted less correctly than concrete metaphors, since

abstract metaphors include a lot of intangible characteristics (Morgan et al., 1999). When consumers cannot create an obvious interpretation of an open ad they need to rely on their stored knowledge. Thus, the narrative is created on the basis of their personal experience and imagination. Story ads are open to several narrative possibilities and thus to a multitude of possible interpretations (Ketelaar et al., 2012). As discussed earlier, narratives are commonly used in fashion ads. However, alternative interpretations may lead to a persuasive advantage when the same ad might attract diverse consumers deciding what interpretation is the most relevant for them (Ketelaar et al., 2012). Philips et al. (2010) state that generally the role of aesthetic properties in defeating consumer resistance to persuasion is unnoticed. Especially, when the aim is to create impressions, the use of visual signs is more effective. A visual and sensory branding environment forces consumers to reflect on and make sense of signs. Thus, consumers interpret and become to understand brand related signs through a process of aesthetic reflexivity. (Ketelaar et al., 2012).

Visual communications play a key strategic role in brands global success. However, as debated in subchapter 3.1., targeting the culturally diverse audience does not come without problems. (Bulmer et al., 2006). As discussed earlier, open, visual ads leave room for multiple interpretations and the message intended might not be transferred to consumers. This is highlighted especially when it comes to global consumers. When they are interpreting ads, consumers apply the elements in the ads in combination with the knowledge stored in their memory, including cultural understanding about meaning of rhetorical figures, and what they know about advertising on the whole (Ketelaar et al., 2012). Similarly Bulmer et al. (2006) state that awareness of advertising genres and the prior knowledge of the characteristic structures of traditional stories have an effect on how consumers comprehend the complex advertising narratives. When interpreting ads, consumers use inter-textual references to other ads, stories, songs, artworks and films (Chadler, 2001; see Bulmer et al., 2006). These inter-textual references draw from narratives and signs of specific cultural contexts. Crane (2000:202; see Kuruc, 2008) states that the images fashion

brands create in their fashion shows and stores, like the photographs of these taken for fashion magazines and advertisement, are rummaged from history, films, television, arts, street cultures, gay subcultures etc. by their makers. As a social being, humans understand signs and meanings in relation to their social environment.

One of the problems of global advertising is how to adjust to both complexity and simplicity in communication with diverse target audience. In the contemporary advertising environment the complexity of visual communications is increasing while they have to appeal to wider, global, audiences. Visual communication on local level tends to be rich and multi-layered, more implicit and reliant on indirect messaging. However, this kind of approach may not suite to diverse consumers in multiple markets and simplicity could be more appropriate than complexity. (Bulmer et al., 2006). Furthermore, the effect of the visual communication depends also on whether conducted in high or low context countries. Hall (1973; see An, 2007), categorized cultures into high-context cultures and low-context cultures. High-context cultures include regions like Scandinavia, the United States and England. Japan, China, Brazil and Spain are examples of low-context countries. In high-context cultures few words can communicate a complex meaning, while in low-context cultures communication needs to be more explicit and detailed background information is needed in the interaction with others. Advertising in high-context cultures is emotional, indirect, symbolic and less informational in its nature, whereas in low-context cultures advertising focuses on detailed arguments, directness, and personalization, and reflects the forcefulness of its culture (An, 2007). Bulmer et al. (2006) state that while some concepts might be universal, the visual communication of these is not. While in the art world it is broadly accepted that images are culturally bound, symbolic and dependent on the observer's interpretation, advertising theory frequently assumes that a certain kind of "visual Esperanto" exists of which symbols and pictures speak to all (Callow et al., 1999; see Bulmer et al., 2006). In conclusion, visual advertising is a complex world with certain difficulties but with potential for communicating an immense amount in a glance.

4. Theoretical framework

In this chapter the theoretical framework of this thesis will be presented. The theoretical framework is divided in two parts: the company and consumer, which are both affected by the fashion and the cultural context they function in. (Picture 2).

At the company side, the brand identity is defined. The way the identity is defined is influenced by cultural context where the brand functions and specificities of the fashion industry. The identity is communicated to consumers through advertising.

Brand identity is the company's definition of itself (Aaker et al., 2000a, 51; Kapferer, 1997, 91-92). The brand identity creates a base for all the actions of the brand. Fashion industry is one of the industries where design is the most central value factor (see Salimäki, 2003, 18) and product design is central to the brand identity (Ravasi, 2008). High-fashion brands function in saturated markets at the high-end price range where the competitive advantage is gained through differentiating design (Salimäki, 2003, 19; Walsh et al. 1992; Riedel, Roy et al. 1996; see Lindström et al., 2006, 35). The aesthetics of the brand and its products create added value for consumers who consume fashion brands for the *immaterial benefits that appeal to the emotional, social and psychological levels of their being* (Okonkwo, 2007, 2) that the brands offer. The cultural context, the country of origin, influences the building of a brand identity as the identity derives from the brand's roots and heritage, from the precise values and benefits that give it its unique authority and authenticity (Kapferer, 2004, 102). Brands exploit their heritage and cultural image in differing themselves from others (Schultz et al., 2005, 28). Like humans, brands have personalities that tell who they are and where they come from. Kapferer (2004, 120) states brands to have personalities that gradually build up their character through communications. The tone of communications, the way in which the brand speaks, reveals

what kind of person it would be if it were a person. An important channel for communicating the identity is brand advertising.

Advertising plays a key role in driving the flow of cultural forms and meanings through narrative-based and image centred descriptions (Archpru et al., 2004). Advertisement can be used for image creation when the execution is often visually led, or for tactical communication with more textual content describing product features. However, in general the visual appeal is the most significant aspect of an advertising message (An, 2007). Visual ads are often used to transfer narratives that immerse consumers in the brand stories that are often emotionally loaded (Philips et al., 2010). In contrast, factual ads communicate more commonly product feature based information and do not affect emotional responses in consumers in the same manner as narrative ads do. The term ad openness is used to refer to the quantity of guidance towards a planned interpretation. Visually-led advertisement leave more room for different interpretations and are thus described as open, whereas the level of openness decreases with textual elements that guide the viewer towards the intended interpretation. (Ketelaar et al., 2012). Fashion ads consist most often only of branded imagery and include elements that permit consumers to perform a narrative. (Philips et al., 2010). By consuming hedonic brands, such as fashion brands, consumers look for emotional and pleasurable experiences (Atwal et al., 2009) thus, advertisement of these brands should be able to transfer emotional and hedonic meanings. Brand associations to an origin are a strong source of brand appeal and they are used largely in advertising (Thakor et al., 2003). Origin cues in advertising can be direct or subtle. "Made in" claims and other obvious features are examples of direct cues. Reference to an origin can be done also in a more subtle way through visual appeals etc. Origin cues are commonly used in fashion, especially in luxury brands' advertising, as heritage and roots play often an important role for the brand identity of these brands. The cultural context where the advertisement is published affects the ad's visual and textual execution. When moving to global markets, brands need to decide whether to standardize or localize their ads. This is because, the meaning of an object of a symbol may change as cultural forms

or symbols move to a new culture. Depending on the receiver, the message communicated through advertising can be decoded in different ways.

Consumers' interpretation of the brand identity is called brand image: the sum of associations consumers attach to a brand (Koubaa, 2008). Brand image is formed through the evaluations process of different associations consumers attach to the brand through the consuming of the brand's advertising (the grey arrow in the picture 2). The process is affected by the consumer's own interpretations, that draw from the consumer's cultural context. Consumer's evaluations of the brand are done in relation to the fashion context of the brand.

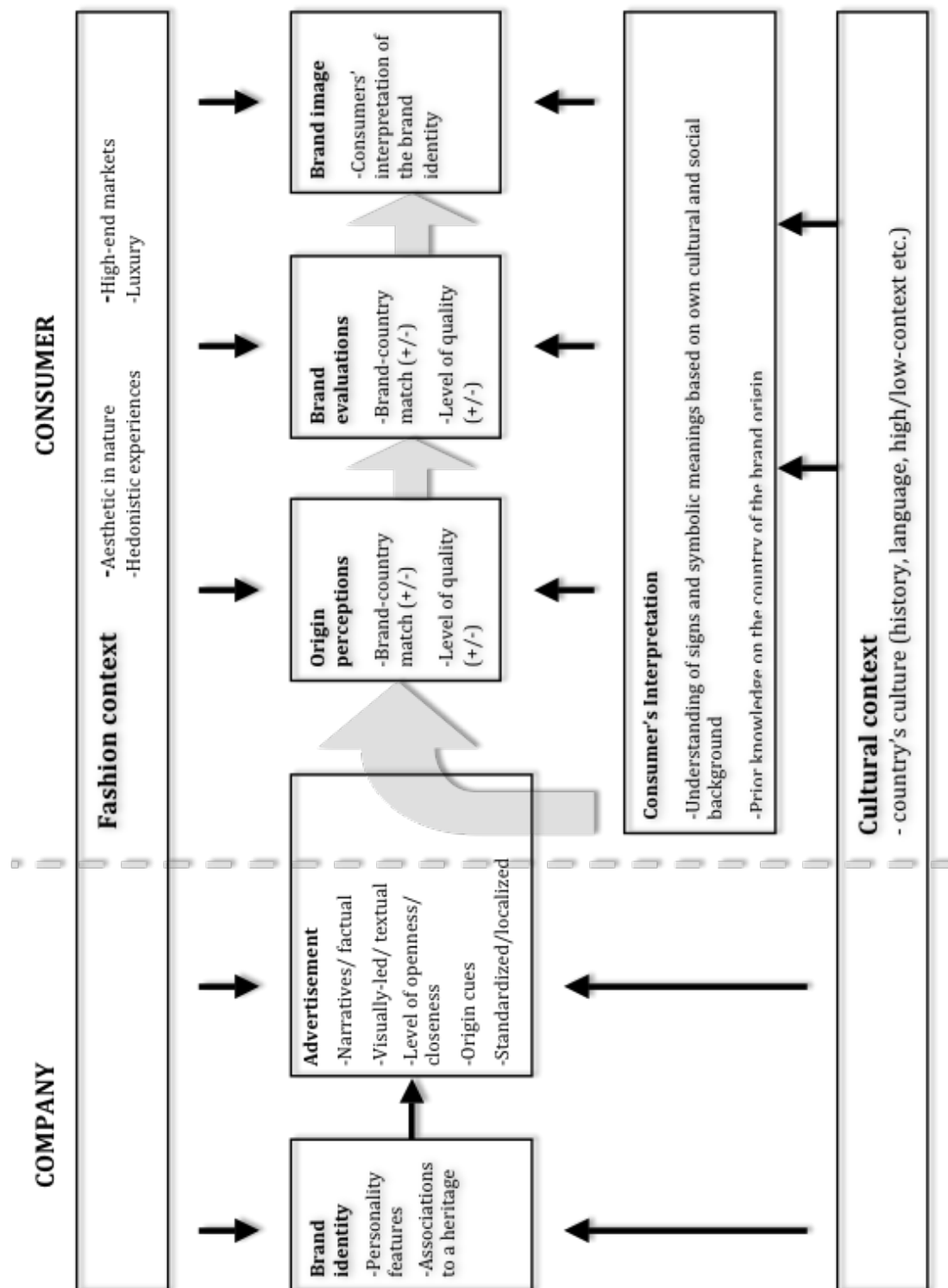
In today's consumer culture, ads are often consumed as such. This is the case especially with fashion advertisement. Ad imagery is consumed as an enjoyable viewing experience, as an artwork itself. Ad imagery offers an occasion for consumers to develop a story. As consumers create the story based on their own image associations, the brand story becomes part of their own story and the brand experience intensifies. (Philips et al., 2010). Since being often visually led and transferring narratives, fashion ads in most cases could be described as open. However, a single picture may encompass several highly sophisticated interrelated signs and numerous levels of meanings (Bulmer et al., 2006). The cultural context of consumers affects the interpretation of these different signs and meanings. Each culture has its own history, mythology, conventions and sign systems that create a base on how people interpret their environment. Consumers reflect the signs of ads to these cultural signs, thus, creating different interpretations. Furthermore, the evaluation of origin clues is done in comparison to the existing knowledge of the image of the country of the brand origin, as the associations related to the country are transferred to and compared with the origin cues in the advertisement.

Consumers create origin perceptions through the origin cues they detect from the brand's advertisement. The origin related perceptions affect the quality evaluations of the brand. In general, products from undeveloped and emerging economies are perceived deteriorative to products from developed

countries (Lim et al. 2001). The link between quality and the country of origin is vital in the case of high design products such as luxury items. According to Jackson & Shaw (2009, 122-123), the country of origin is a key feature consumers look for in a luxury product. The qualitative perceptions become positive when a connection between the country of brand origin and the brand is recognized. In those product categories where a particular country is highly viewed as a producer of a certain product, consumers are especially evaluative of the brand origin when making decisions. (Samiee et al. 2005). Generally, the associated country image is either an asset or a liability depending on whether it is considered to be positive or negative (Lambert et al. 1998).

From the evaluation of origin cues, a perceived brand origin is created leading to more general perception, expectations about the brand (Thakor et al., 2003). General brand evaluations are made for one part on the basis of origin perceptions. When there is a positive match between the brand associations and the perceived origin, the brand is evaluated positively. Furthermore, if the country is viewed as a producer of quality items in the category of the brand in question, the brand is evaluated positively, and vice versa. As noted earlier, consumers create evaluations always in comparison to substitutes; thus, in this context they evaluate brands to other fashion brands and to other brand originating from the same country. This knowledge might stem from their memories even unintentionally.

The overall evaluations of the brand associations lead to the creation of brand image in consumers' minds. At an abstract level, brand associations are considered in the form of benefits and brand attitudes that sum-up the information related to the brand. These form a more relevant relationship with the consumer self than product attributes do. (Hsieh et al. 2005). Thus, it is vital that the perceived image, and all the associations leading to this are positive. Even though, in this thesis the focus is on advertising and origin cues, it should be noted that the brand image is created from complex associations drawn from various sources.



Picture 2: Theoretical framework

5. Methodology

In this chapter the methodology behind the thesis' empirical research will be introduced. The purpose of this thesis is to provide understanding on how consumers perceive possible origin cues in fashion brands' advertisement through the visual appeals in international advertisement. To study consumers' perceptions, a qualitative approach was chosen. The following subchapters will present more thoroughly the chosen research strategy, how the data is collected and analyzed, and the validity and reliability of the research is assessed.

5.1. *The research strategy*

Compared to quantitative research aiming to establish correlative and causal relationships through statistical testing of hypothesis, qualitative research produces descriptive and interpretative data. It targets at building a deeper and more holistic understanding of the topic under study. (Eskola et al., 2008, 61). One of the most important benefits of qualitative research is that it provides a deeper understanding to consumer behavior and gives a consumers' perspective to the studied subject (Solatie, 1997, 12). A qualitative research is a way to get closer to consumers' emotional and unconscious knowledge constructions such as motives, images and feelings. The benefit and richness of qualitative research is in its multidimensionality and adaptability. (Solatie 1997, 12-13). As this thesis research is exploratory in its nature to understand how consumers perceive origin cues in fashion advertisement's visual appeals, a qualitative approach is the most suitable for the collection and analysis of data in this thesis.

In advertising research conduction, it is important to detect which elements appear as the most "telling" and rhetorically powerful from the consumer's perspective. One from of communication is visual rhetoric, which employs images for creating meanings. Visual rhetoric examines how visual images

work alone or work together with other elements in creating a reasoning designed to move a specific audience. (Bulmer et al., 2006).

In this thesis the qualitative approach is utilized to understand how the respondents evaluate Marimekko's advertisement and how they perceive origin cues from these. The qualitative approach allows a deeper understanding on the consumers' perceptions on the ads, as the respondents are able to describe more thoroughly their feelings and other perceptions towards the ads. The data collection is conducted from a visual rhetoric approach by using a self-completion questionnaire, which allows the participants to analyze the ads as a whole. This will provide a deeper understanding on how the visual appeals affect consumers' origin perceptions and brand evaluations.

5.2. *Data collection*

When conducting an advertisement research, a visual rhetoric approach (analyzing the visual elements of an ad) allows the respondent to analyze the ad as whole, rather than paying attention to single visual details (Bulmer et al., 2006). As the purpose of this thesis is to study consumers' origin perceptions based on the visual appeals in fashion advertisement, different ads from a Finnish fashion brand were chosen, all of which constructed mostly from visual elements. On the basis of the theoretical framework a questionnaire concerning the ads was created and sent to a group of university students in Finland.

5.2.1. Choice of advertisement

In order to gain a better understanding on how consumers perceive possible origin cues in ads, the brand based on these ads, and furthermore, how the possible differences on visual execution in different markets effects

consumers' perception, ads from only one brand were selected. This excludes other brand variables that would influence consumers' perceptions. All of the ads were chosen based on their high level of visual elements (with little verbal features), since the emphasis on this thesis is paid specially to the visual appeals in advertisement. Two of the ads were from Finnish magazines and two from overseas markets (the United States and Japan) in order to compare whether the possible localizations on visual executions had different impacts on consumers' perceptions.

Marimekko, founded in 1951, is one of the biggest fashion brands in Finland. Moreover, the company is famous for its textiles and other interior design items. Marimekko is constantly increasing their international operations, while they have decades long experience from international markets. They have invested heavily to international expansion during the last few years, by opening new shops and advertising in magazines in their target markets. Thus, Marimekko was a suitable firm for the research.

5.2.2. Questionnaire

Similar to structured interview, a self-completion questionnaire was chosen as the tool for data collection. The presence of an interviewer might affect the answers the respondents give. The benefit of a self-completion questionnaire compared to an interview is that the effects of an interviewer are eliminated. (Bryman, 2004, 133). As the purpose of this research is to study how consumers perceive the possible origin cues in advertisement, that are often visually-led and open to various interpretations as discussed in chapter 3, it was important that the respondents gave their cognitive answers based on their own observation, without the interviewer possible guiding them to certain interpretations. However, it should be noted, that the assumptions and subjective opinions of the interviewer are reflected in the choice of questions to some extent.

All the questions were open-ended which allowed the respondents to describe their impressions and interpretations on the cues they found freely,

without guidance. This approach gives richer answers on the subject (Bryman, 2004, 320). The theoretical framework provided a basis for the formation of the questions. The same four questions about the four different ads were asked with a final question that gave a deeper understanding on the grounds of the respondents' evaluations.

5.2.3. Respondents

University students are used as respondents in earlier studies on advertisement and origin perceptions. In qualitative research it is important that the respondents have an understanding on the subject under study. Young adults are often interested in fashion and fashion brands target this group through their communications. University students are also most likely to consume magazines where these ads were published (i.e. NYT (Helsingin Sanomat) and New York Times Magazine).

The questionnaire was first sent to students of two Arts marketing courses in Aalto University through their course administration system, Noppa. As only one student gave answer, the questionnaire was sent via email to 20 students similar to the first group, and later to the students of Art Theory, Criticism and Management-program of Aalto University and University of Helsinki.

All together, 15 students answered the questionnaire. The themes that arouse from the data where rather clear from this group of respondents. Furthermore, no new insights came from the few last respondents, thus, it could be argued that the data started to be saturated and no additional responses were needed for the purposes of this thesis. The students were majoring mostly in marketing and communications, with three exceptions (economics, Finnish language, Nordic languages), two of the respondents had a nationality other than Finnish and all the respondents were females. As the research is qualitative in its nature, the purpose is not to provide universally applicable results, but to gain some insight to the question under study. Thus, the respondents represent a valid group for the purposes of this

thesis, as they are able to provide qualitative descriptions that are important when seeking an answer to the research questions, and furthermore, they represent a target group important for Marimekko, of which ads are under evaluation in this study.

5.3. *Data analysis*

Thompson et al. (1990) discusses about interactive analyzing process proceeding from the evaluation of different parts to the evaluation of the entirety. In this thesis, first all the answers from the questionnaires will be read thoroughly to gain an understanding as a whole. On the next phase, according to the doctrines of hermeneutics, repeating themes and differences are tried to identify between the answers (Thompson et al., 1990). By raising themes around the theoretical framework the comparison between different themes emerging from the data is possible (Eskola et al., 2000, 174). Quotations from the respondents will be used to back up the drawn interpretations from the data. The final interpretations will reflect a kind of fusion between the interpreted results and the theoretical framework (Thompson, 1997).

Special attention in the analysis is paid on how consumers identify denotative signs within the ads, connotative levels of meaning and the relations between the key elements of the ads. Denotative sign refers to the obvious interpretation of a visual sign. In example, a red rose is interpreted as a red rose. Connotation refers to the other meanings arising from the interpretation: a red rose can be interpreted as a sign of love. (Seppänen, 2005, 116-117).

5.4. *Research reliability and validity*

In a qualitative research the data analysis and the assessment of trustworthiness are not as clearly separable from each other as in

quantitative research. For qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the research process as whole is under evaluation. The starting point for a qualitative research is the researcher's own subjectivity; the researcher acts as a key research tool in the research. (Eskola et al., 2000, 210). The purpose of a qualitative research is not to produce an objective truth about the phenomenon under study rather a certain viewpoint to it. Furthermore, the researcher can never be completely objective, as personal experiences influence interpretation of the data analysis.

Reliability refers to the extent to which the study can be repeated with coherent results (Yin, 2009). An interpretation of data is said to be reliable when it does not contain any contradictions (Eskola et al., 2000, 213). Repeated measurements from the same research participants are taken in order to increase reliability. In this research, the participants gave their responses to four different ads instead of only one.

Validity expresses the extend to which a research measures what it is supposed to measure. Internal validity refers to the strength of the logical linking of the data analysed and the conclusions drawn from these (Yin, 2009). In qualitative research, the term credibility is often used instead of internal validity, and it describes how well the observations concluded during the research process respond to reality (Lincoln et al., 1985). Internal validity is ensured by motivating all the conclusions and how they are drawn. External validity refers to the extend to which the results are generalizable, are transferable to other contexts (Yin, 2009). Validity describes whether the research is thoroughly conducted, and whether the drawn conclusions and results are correct. In this thesis, the collected data is tried to analyse as thoroughly as possible, in order to ensure that the made interpretations are motivated and transferable to the readers. The purpose of this thesis is to gain understanding on the different dimensions of the theoretical framework presented in the chapter 4, and no generalizations are tried to create based on the collected data.

6. The empirical analysis of the research data

In this chapter the collected data will be analyzed with the guidance from the theoretical framework. The first subchapter provides definitions of the notion of Finnish origin based on the respondents' definitions that will be used as a comparison base for the following analysis. In the second subchapter the different origin perceptions will be presented. The third subchapter will focus on the overall brand evaluations of the respondents. In the final subchapter, the findings will be discussed in comparison to the theoretical framework presented in chapter 4.

6.1. *Definitions of Finnish origin*

As the purpose of the empirical research of this thesis is to explore how consumers perceive clues of Finnish origin in advertisement of Finnish fashion brands, in this case Marimekko's, it is vital for the research to define what is meant with "Finnish origin". However, there is no universal definition for this that could be found in dictionaries or in academic theory. Thus, the respondents were asked to describe their definitions for the notion of Finnish origin in order to gain insight what is considered to be characteristic for Finland.

Kotler et al. (2002) define country image as *"the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places. Images represent a simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place.* Furthermore, they mentioned that most of country images are stereotypes. Interestingly, the themes that arose from the comments of the respondents were all rather stereotypical, even though most of the respondents were Finnish and could be assumed to possess a deeper understanding of Finland.

From the data clear themes of nature, quality and trustworthiness, functionality and simplicity, the Finnish “sisu” and modesty, and certain colors arouse. Next these will be discussed more specifically.

6.1.1. Nature

One of the key themes rising from the data was the association of the Finnish origin to nature. This theme appeared in the forms of nature scenery, Finns strong relations to nature, the cleanness of nature, and light in different times.

Many of the respondents defined Finnish origin through listings of elements belonging to the nature scenery such as birches, forest, lakes, light etc.:

“National romantic nature scenery: forest, forest animals, stark rocks and stunted trees, lake views, fields, country cabins and mountains (in Lapland). “

“Water, especially lakes, not sea really.”

Nature appeared also in the form of narratives of Finns relations to the nature and Finland as a place in the world:

“Finns are great lovers of culture and nature and even if they say they don’t like Finland, after they have spent a time abroad they always come back to their own Country. I feel in a way Finns are stronger related with their Country than other Citizens. “

“Foremost closeness to nature is the key thing for me. There’s something eternal about it: that our roots are in the nature and we are dependable on it. It makes us to respect nature as a given, and to appreciate it as an equal.”

The cleanness of nature was mentioned several times as such, without any specific explanations. One of the key characteristics for many respondents seemed to be light, how it appears in different times of the year:

“Light, how it is during summer, and every morning and evening, and how it is when there is snow and how the light reflects from the ground.”

“Light, definitely.”

“Nightless nights, twilight and winter darkness.”

6.1.2. Quality and trustworthiness

Another theme that arose from the data was descriptions of quality and trustworthiness and the interplay between these two. These were in many comments related to Finnish products, as product associations. Trustworthiness appeared often in the form of honesty and transparency:

“Also trustworthiness, honesty and “you know what you get” attitude.”

“The Finnish origin brings in mind a certain kind of humbleness, quality and ethicality. “

Quality and trustworthiness were also often related to the same associations and were in an interplay with each other:

“Finnish origin creates a picture of a product that is of good quality, timeless and trustworthy.”

“I associate clarity and cleanness to Finnish origin. That is, you know where and how some product is made, that the content is at least important as the

design and form. This is strongly related to Finnish raw materials that are of a good quality, and an image that you are happy to pay more for a Finnish origin, because it is in its way a guarantee of clean, of good quality raw materials and honesty.”

It was rather clear from these descriptions that quality considered to be a product feature, something that you can trust to last and to know how and where it is made.

6.1.3. Functionality and simplicity

Functionality and simplicity were closely related to Finnish products. These were use, with their synonyms, to describe the timeless Finnish design, especially the design classics, and clean lines, but also for the mentality of Finns' way of living.

“Instead of trying to follow the latest trends timelessness is appreciated. Products highlighting the Finnish origin do not try to follow slavishly the latest trends but to create classics.”

“Aalto chairs and lamps, Iittala (but not Arabia).”

“The concept of Finnish origin brings to mind cleanness, graphic lines, simplified lines, minimalisms.”

“Finnish origin is related to artlessness, clarity and confidence. That original and quality product sells itself, and it doesn't have to be turned into something it is not or what it should pretend to be. Basically, this is related to functionality and simplicity, the beauty of being.”

On the other hand, functionality was used also to describe the way of Finnish living, in a more negative manner:

“The Finnish origin is connected with a bit over emphasized functionality. Everything should be so modern, clean lines and practical. It feels that the hedonic pleasures of life and beauty are not part of Finnish culture, which is a shame. It feels like that if you want to enjoy or seek purely hedonic pleasures you turn to something else than Finnish – French wines, American entertainment or Italian food. The same goes with dissoluteness. You would never associate dissoluteness or selfish pleasure with unhealthy impacts with Finnish origin.”

This viewpoint is rather interesting and probably quite valid. Extravagant consumption has not really been part of Finnish way of life. People tend to be modest and often people i.e. do not show their wealth. This is evident for instance with luxury brands sold in Finland. Only during the last few years, international luxury brands like Louis Vuitton have opened their stores in Finland, and this is partly because of the Russian tourists. The Finnish restaurant culture is also a good example of the consumption of hedonistic services, or the lack of it. In Finland, people tend to go out to eat with families and friend only during special occasions. Whereas in Central Europe, it is normal for families to go to restaurants during the week and enjoy life with the company of their friends. However, the Finnish culture seems to move towards this trend a bit by bit, at least in the Capital area.

6.1.4. “Sisu” and modesty

The Finnish origin was described also with some personality adjectives like “sisu” (stamina), modesty and humbleness. An image of people who would go through rocks was painted:

“Finland is small, but determinant country.”

“Finns won’t give up.”

“The Finnish sisu.”

“Survival, the knowledge that you will make it.”

While determinant, it was evident that Finns are perceived as people who do not make fuss about their achievements. Finns were described as modest and humble:

“On the other hand, part of being Finnish is certain modesty. Instead of frostings and glitter, a certain kind of stability and safety fits to Finnish origin.”

Modesty was experienced to be even a somewhat negative part of the Finnish origin:

“It is characteristic for Finland to be even too humble. This is kind of associated with the thought that Finnish products are even better than we let know, because being Finnish is strongly related to modesty and to the underestimation of own achievements.”

Overall, these descriptions do not give the picture of people who are light and cheerful enjoying the hedonistic pleasures of life. Based on these comments, Finns are stable, determinant and maybe even somewhat introverts, who work hard, but do not seek for glory and fame.

6.1.5. Colours of Finland

Many of the respondents associated certain colours to the Finnish origin. Colours were associated to variety of things such as nature, people, and fabrics. Single colours that were mentioned were obviously the colours of the Finnish flag: blue and white. Generally, also the freshness and clarity were mentioned that can be attached to colours, since they are in definition visual in nature.

Again, the impact of Finnish nature was rather visible in the definitions:

“Strong, natural colours. Sometimes blue and white.”

“Natural materials and prints.”

“Instead of taking the middle way, the extreme ends are worth of seeking: simplified forms or wild prints and strong colours.”

The colour palette associated with Finnish origin included also the appearance of typical Finnish people:

“The lightness of the skin colour, blond hairs.”

“Typical Finnish, blond models”.

It was evident that most of the colours associated with Finnish origin came from the colours of nature; even the Finnish flag represents the colours of blue sky and winter snow. Interesting was that many of the respondents mentioned strong colours and vivid prints. The first thing that comes to mind is in fact the colourful fabrics of Marimekko that have most likely been a part of every Finns life.

6.2. *Origin perceptions*

From the data three different levels of describing origin perceptions arose that differed in the intensity of the immersion in and identifying with the origin cues in the Marimekko ads. All of these different levels also varied in the way the match between the brand and the origin was perceived. However, no quality assessments arose from the data based on the level of quality that is viewed in relation to the Finnish origin. All the quality evaluations were made on a more general level when evaluating the ads and Marimekko brand in general, and will be discussed later.

The three levels of origin perception descriptions can be categorized under the themes of narratives of Finland, “I remember when” and mixed messages. Each category was strongly related to certain ad(s). The narratives of Finland theme was evident in the two ads published in Finnish magazines (appendixes 1 and 4), “I remember when...” rose from the ad in New York Times Magazine (appendix 3) and the mixed messages was a clear theme in the case of the ad published in Japan (appendix 1).

6.2.1. Narratives of Finland

The theme narratives of Finland rose from the two ads published in the Finnish magazines. References to the origin cues described in the subchapter 6.1. were most evident in this category as the respondents used these cues to describe the ads, both denotatively and connotatively. These ads also created a clear narrative transfer through the ads’ images, as the respondents immersed themselves in the world represented in the ads.

Ads in this category were clearly associated with the Finnish origin, as most of the origin cues defined earlier were used to describe the ads. Associations to Finnish origin were perceived through the field scenery, light in the ads,

colours, the Finnish looking models and their expressions. Furthermore, the respondents' own knowledge and experiences transferred through their comments and interpretations.

The denotative descriptions of the ads' elements included many cues referring to the Finnish origin that the respondents categorized straightforwardly with Finland through the definition of Finnish origin. The field scenery and the Finnish appearance of the model were the denotative meanings:

"Field of corn, lined by an old fence. A blond woman, an "Elovena-girl."

"There's a woman walking on a field/on a country side. She is wearing a long grey winter coat."

"The model looks very Finnish – she's long, relaxed, long-haired, light skinned and her make-up is really natural, or she might not have nothing at all. The clothes and (missing) accessories have been selected in the relaxed Finnish style, not ostentatiously."

"Finnish field scenery and a Finnish looking model with greyish (maantieharmaine) hair are clearly of Finnish origin."

According to Ryu et al. (2006), when a consumer sees an ad, the most common expectation is that the endorser's ethnic background is the same as the product's origin. In the case of these two ads of Marimekko, the connection was created. Connotative descriptions made the interpretations deeper by continuing with the same themes of field, the Finnish looking model, but added assessments of the light and colours, and the general feeling of the ad:

"The autumn afternoon sun is shining and brings warmth to the picture. The coat on the model looks thick, so the air must be crisp."

"The ad brings autumn to mind, and even though it has very warm colours, the ad makes a bit cold feeling because of the heavy coat on the girl. Colours are soft, the girl's hair bright red and the cold of morning wafts from the whole ad."

“The light comes from right and from quite low, which I would associate to Finnish summer night.”

“The field and the light. Field of corn is part of the key Finnish symbols, everybody knows the light of a summer night.”

“The ad creates images of Finland’s autumn, clear autumn days and nature.”

All of these descriptions include the respondent’s previous knowledge of how the light must look like during different seasons, most likely they have experienced these personally. Also the associations from wearing a “heavy” or “thick” coat were related to autumn, and cold crisp air. From the descriptions, it was rather clear that the respondents’ had own experiences from the different seasons in Finland (or North). When consumers cannot create an obvious interpretation of an ad they need to rely on their stored knowledge. Overall, straightforward associations to Finnish origin were created.

The ads in this category created immersion in the images. The respondents started to create narratives around the models of the ads:

“I feel that the woman has just seen a wonderful man and is now walking slowly back home and remembers the meeting and dreams about the next one.”

“It seems like the girl is waiting for someone. There might be someone walking towards her.”

“The girl is walking in Finnish country scenery, it is clear and light autumn weather. The girl is on a good mood, energetic, and she is gaining strength from the light and is breathing the fresh autumn air. Her mind is focused on some fun, even a bit mischievous memory, which makes her smile. The girl is totally satisfied with her being, she’s leading a good life.”

In these stories, references to determination described in the subchapter 6.1. were made by interpreting the model’s posture and facial expressions:

“The woman in the ad is crossing a field and is trying not to mess her precious dress. The dress is impractical concerning the circumstances but

the woman sticks to her choice and look like she's determined to go through rock and stones. The dress brings her dignity."

"Is the girl looking at someone, or is she just determinant is a bit unclear. Her facial expression is however determinant and a bit sneaky. She seems to know what she wants are walks confidently towards it, no matter is it a person or a picture of something to come."

"A woman is walking on a field wearing a colourful dress. She seems to be in a hurry, she is going somewhere. She seems to know where she is going and is heading there with speed. You could imagine that she has even a small "I know it all" (tietävä) smile on her face."

Overall, these ads created a strong link between the brand and the brand origin. Consumers associated the perceived clues in advertisement to the brand, and in these two Marimekko ads, there were clear clues referring to the Finnish origin. Furthermore, there was no real difference between the Finnish and non-Finnish respondents, and the origin cues were perceived similarly by all the respondents. This might hint, that this type of ads may appeal to global consumers as well.

6.2.2. "I remember when..."

The second theme that rose from the data was the perception of origin cues through stories based on the respondents' own memories of and personal experiences with Marimekko. Unlike in the first category, in this category the references to the Finnish origin were not made mostly through the origin definitions described in subchapter 6.1., even though few of these were mentioned as well.

"In the pictures of the ad are prints and clothes, that are like symbols of Finland. In Finland, these are worn from birth till grave."

"There are a lot of familiar things for Finns, like the Jokapoika stripe shirt and the Unikko fabric. The designs and colours are familiar and bring to mind home, summer cabin or my grandmother's place. There are a lot of elements in these pictures and they all repeat Finnish design. The things, atmospheres, objects and prints in the pictures are all familiar for us from years times and have been part of our life since we were little."

“The ad is in its versatility candy for the eyes and takes mind to many different situations where Marimekko’s products have been part of my own life. I.e. “that’s the teapot I got when I graduated at Christmas 2010, or I actually have pink Unikko sheets on a package at the upper closet, I should use them.””

“Boldness, striking colours, graphic patterns, large prints, children, dresses, china, bed sheets, Marimekko as a part of the everyday life. The ad evokes positive feelings, Marimekko compressed in its cheerfulness. Throws the whole scale of feelings in front of the viewer, which you can get stimuli and ideas, you even notice thing you didn’t remember to be part of the collections and on the other hand you can find the familiar, dear prints and products.”

With the warm memories a clear sense of national pride rose in some of the respondents:

“A thrilling feeling arises in me, that I am actually proud of the fact that we have such a great and varying brand in Finland – I am proud of it and hope at the same time that Marimekko would succeed out there in the world in the best possible way.”

“Feelings, that rise are linked to being “homey”, comfortable and happiness, being happy. I feel that I want to cheer for a Finnish brand to succeed in the world and I’m wishing all the best for it.”

As the references to the Finnish origin were created mostly through personal experiences, it was rather clear that the non-Finnish respondents did not associate this ad with Finnish origin. When assessing the match between the brand and origin from the viewpoint of the intended target audience (residents of New York), it could be argued that the match might not occur. This is because most of the origin cues were drawn from respondents memories and it is most likely that U.S. citizens do not share these, as Marimekko has not been part of their everyday life in the manner it has been for most people in Finland. Even though some signs can be positioned constantly across cultures, their relevance and significance may vary (Archpru et al., 2010). However, while the intended target audience might not associate the ad to the Finnish origin, they might link it to a larger origin, the Scandinavia:

“The Finnish origin is not obvious in the ad, but the Scandinavian origin is. The clues referring to the Finnish origin are the birch print and on the other hand the classic prints of Marimekko, which I know to be made by Marimekko and that’s why I know they are Finnish. Instead, the freshness, modernity, graphical look, playfulness and relaxness represent the Scandinavian origin to me. I could even say that the ad is unusually non-Finnish to be a Marimekko’s ad, I think of even the 1960’s United States and “Andy Warholism” pop art. “

“The design of the china is really Scandinavian.”

“Also the birch pattern fabric is very Scandinavian.”

Knowledge of different terms and signs depends on knowledge of the system to which they belong to, and these make sense only through comparison with and distinction from other signs and terms (Cayla et al., 2008). From the data it was clear that the respondents had prior knowledge on the products presented in the ad. Marimekko could be described as a Finnish institution and it could be argued to arouse several associations in the respondents, most of who have personal experiences with the products and thus are likely to understand the signs of the ad.

6.2.3. Mixed perceptions

The theme “Mixed perceptions” rose from the Marimekko ad published in a Japanese magazine. This theme woke mixed origin perceptions in the respondents. Both Finnish and Japanese origin clues were found from this ad. However, the difference between these was that the Finnish origin clues seemed to be denotative whereas the Japanese origin cues rose from connotative meanings. Furthermore, some of the respondents mentioned several origins when interpreting the ad.

The perceived Finnish origin cues were drawn mostly from the verbal elements of the ad. The reference to the Finnish origin in the ad was

denotative as in the text Finland was clearly mentioned (It's spring time in Finland). Also the signature (Erja Hirvi) was clearly of Finnish origin:

"Besides the 'It's spring time in Finland' greeting, nothing refers to the Finnish origin."

"The signature of the greeting's writer, Erja Hirvi, refers to the Finnish origin."

"There is a text under the girl, maybe from the designer of the print. She tells that it is spring in Finland."

"The greeting from the designer. Otherwise the ad doesn't look like Finnish or refer to the Finnish origin."

According to Head (1988), through the "made in " advertising slogans foreign audiences' attention is directed towards the positive and most often stereotypical attributes of another country and the advertised brand originating from that country is diffused with these image-enhancing qualities. However, not all the respondents found clues referring to the Finnish origin and some of them could not form a clear perception of the origin:

"I can't find anything referring to the Finnish origin in this ad."

"There's nothing special in the picture that would refer to the Finnish origin. The girl seems Nordic, but she could be from i.e. one of the former East-block countries. The girl's haircut and also the a bit submissive attitude refer in their turn to Asia. In the Nordic countries, women are most often pictured as strong and determinative, not really as bashful and from the top in a submissive position."

When consumers associate the endorser's ethnicity to the products origin, the brand may benefit from this connection (Ryu et al., 2006). However, it could be argued that if there is a contradiction between these two, the brand might be evaluated less favourably. Since the respondents knew that Marimekko originates from Finland, the model's not so clear ethnicity might have led to more negative evaluations.

“The model looks kind of Finnish with her light complexion and features, but her way of posing in a rather girly manner is not so traditional Finnish girl next door style, but more like the spirit of an international metropolis. It is hard to say why, but in my opinion this picture is precisely international, not really Finnish.”

“Either New York or London comes to mind immediately – not really Southern Europe or an overly feminine French, but precisely a confident and fresh woman from the hustle and bustle of the cities of London and New York.”

According to Samiee et al. (2005) the most difficult case of brand origin recognition accuracy is, where consumers link the brand to various origins. This is even more difficult if at the same time this information plays a role in their choice behavior. (Samiee et al., 2005).

Besides the perceived Finnish and mixed origin cues, many of the respondents found references to the Japanese origin. Most often these were drawn from interpretations of connotative meanings, even though some denotative references were found as well:

“Can’t found (references to the Finnish origin). The picture’s flowers bring in mind cherry trees and Japan.”

“Youthful, sensual, a hint of Japanese spirit? Directed to the Asian market? No, but heh, that is .jp – is this really for the Asian market? The flowers of cherry trees communicate this.”

“The woman’s look is somehow “Japanese” and maybe the haircut? Also her facial expression. The pout lips – subtle sexiness.”

“You can see from the web address that it is an ad published in Japan.”

From the answers it was rather clear that this ad affected the most mixed origin cue interpretations and perceptions in the respondents. It might be concluded that the ad was localized to the Japanese market by using rather stereotypical cues (at least from the Western perspective) such as the flowers of the cherry trees and to somewhat submissive woman. It would be

rather interesting to know, how Japanese would define the notion of Japanese origin themselves. According to Archpru et al. (2010), consumers comprehend global consumer culture signs and behaviors but constantly count on their own local meaning systems for interpretation, use and expression.

6.3. *Brand evaluations*

The origin cue perceptions are likely to influence the way consumers evaluate the brands. Furthermore, the interpretations of ads influence the overall brand perceptions of consumers. Similarly to the different perceptions of origin cues between the different ads, the respondents evaluated the brand differently depending on the ad.

6.3.1. Origin-brand match

From the data it was rather clear that there was a division between the ads similar to the groupings presented in the subchapter 6.2. when assessing the respondents evaluations of the brand. There was a clear link between the Finnish origin definitions and the brand perceptions in the case of the two ads published in Finnish magazines (Narratives of Finland). Furthermore, these ads were evaluated most positively. In the case of the ad published in the NY Times Magazine, which was linked to the Finnish origin through personal memories stemming from the associations through products presented in the ads ("I remember when..."), Marimekko was evaluated similarly through the product associations, without a clear link to the origin. However, the brand created positive associations. The last case was the Japanese ad, which arose mixed origin perceptions among the respondents. Similarly, confusions were clear in the respondents' answers, and the brand based on this ad was evaluated positively, neutrally and negatively.

When assessing the same ads as in the theme “Narratives of Finland”, the respondents described the brand with the same terms as they had defined the Finnish origin. The Finnish origin was even mentioned when the respondents were asked to describe the brand. Especially references to nature were made:

“Natural, Finnish, earthy and trendy.”

“Authenticity, naturalness, the Finnish origin and traditionalism were transferred through the ad.”

“Earthy, domestic, soft and traditional.”

Ballantyne et al. (2006) suggest that authenticity and integrity are likely to attract modern consumers and the heritage is one of the most precious assets in creating an image of these. A connection to the Finnish origin to which authenticity and integrity were defined to be characteristic to, is thus a great association for Marimekko. Furthermore, the brand was described to be determinant and stable, just like the respondents defined the Finnish origin:

“Feminine brand, strong and determinant, unshakable and stable. There’s a lot of confidence. Brand, that knows where it is coming from and where it is heading.”

“Finnish, strong but sensitive.”

There were a lot of descriptions of stability, traditionalism, timelessness that were also used to define the Finnish origin. However, sometimes this was interpreted even as “old-fashioned.” Said this, all the other brand evaluations were positive and it could be argued that the positive origin associations were transferred to the brand. The qualitative perceptions become positive when a connection between the country of brand origin and the brand is recognized (Lambert et al., 1998).

In the case of the ad of the theme “I remember when...” the brand was evaluated positively, but there was not as clear link to the Finnish origin as in the case of the previous theme. The link to the Finnish origin was made through the references to the graphical and vivid colors that were also mentioned when the respondents were asked to describe what they perceived to be characteristic to Finland. Having said that, it might be argued that for the starting point, associating strong prints and colors to the Finnish origin comes most likely from the associations to Marimekko. Thus, respondents who would not have such a strong link to Finland might not link these features to the Finnish origin.

There seemed to be a certain level of cohesion between the evaluations of different respondents. The interpretations were rather clearly based on the variation of Marimekko’s products and prints, just as was the case with origin perceptions. On a brand level however, no personal experiences were mentioned.

“Colorful, fresh, family friendly, everyday (brand).”

“Directed to families, trusting in design, bold, colorful, everyday style.”

“Cheerful, colorful, graphic and dynamic.”

“(Based on this ad) Marimekko’s brand is fresh, modern, colorful, innovative, versatile, bold, original, graphic, playful, exciting, nostalgic, even retro.”

Even though no personal references were made, it might be that descriptions such as everyday style and nostalgia rose from the personal knowledge of and experiences with the brand, that evoke from the associations with childhood and the common use of Marimekko’s fabrics in almost every Finnish home. As discussed before, these associations might not come to mind to the non-Finnish consumers.

The descriptions were rather obviously based on the products displayed in the ad, and many of the respondents described the brand through products:

“The brand has a lot to say and it is clearly not a so called “one thing” company.”

“The brand concentrates to the everyday life, to which it wants to bring color and joy through its products.”

“This ad shows the different products Marimekko makes. Based on the ad you could tell what kinds of brand is in question.”

“A brand that sells several items.”

These evaluations of the brand are quite deductive. Furthermore, almost all the descriptions were done on the level of simply describing the different elements found in the ad. This ad did not seem create any immersion. Although generally positive evaluations were made based on the ad, few, including both of the non-Finnish respondents simply stated the ad and brand to be *“too gaudy, unquiet and chaotic.”* It should be also noted, that all of these respondents had not associated any personal memories with the ad.

The last theme “mixed perceptions” continued when it came to the evaluation of the brand as whole. No clear evaluation of the brand could be drawn based on the data, as there seemed to be as many different descriptions as there were respondents. The only descriptions given more than one respondents were *“girly, fresh, youthful and colorful”*. However, there were none referring to the Finnish origin, when the respondents were asked to describe the brand. If compared to the first theme, which matched the definitions of the Finnish origin, with this theme, it could be argued that some of the definitions were actually contradictory with the Finnish origin, as the ad/model was described unnatural:

“The model in the picture looks like she’s feeling uncomfortable.”

“The model is in “annoying” position and having annoying facial expression. There’s no naturalness.”

“The model is posing in a position that doesn’t look natural.”

Compared to the descriptions in the case of the first theme highlighting naturalness that was one of the most important themes when defining Finnish origin, this theme was contradictory lacking it, and affected somewhat negative responses. The responses toward this ad changed from positive to clearly negative and unsure. Generally, positive cues in an ad create positive response in a consumer who attaches this positive sense to the advertised brand, and vice versa (Philips et al., 2010).

6.3.2. Quality perceptions

When it came to the quality perceptions, the evaluations followed the same pattern as described previously. The first theme was perceived to represent an of quality, high-end brand, the second was also mentioned to be a high-end brand, whereas the last theme was evaluated once again with mixed results, but also was the only one with negative evaluations.

The first theme was described with more quality related features than the other ones. All of these referred to a high-end, high-quality brand:

“Of high quality, timeless.”

“Based on the ad, the brand radiates naturalness, timelessness and durability. The brand seems to be directed to grown women, who posses purchasing power, since the ad gives references to the fact that the products are at least middle-priced or even expensive.”

“Of high quality, fashionable, expensive.”

“Made for the people who go their own ways, who want beautiful and durable products.”

Besides the straightforward mentioning of high quality, the references to durability and being an expensive brand can be interpreted as indicators of high quality. Quality products are often long lasting, and an expensive price is most often an indicator of the quality materials and assembly. However, it should be noted that is not always the case.

The ads of the first theme were also clearly perceived to represent a fashion brand and were compared to the international luxury brands that are considered to be of high quality:

“With this type of high-fashion advertisement, Marimekko strives to compete with other big fashion houses.”

“This ad creates an image of Marimekko as a fashion house of the “big world”, among Chanel and YSL.”

“Based on the ad, Marimekko presents itself precisely as feminine, highlighting femininity. Not as the producer of shapeless, cotton “home-mom” dresses, but as a fashion house of feminine and luxurious clothing.

“I think this is strongly an editorial type fashion picture, that wants to build a picture of Marimekko as an international high level fashion house.”

Interestingly, in all of these descriptions the perception of Marimekko as a high-fashion brand was built through the certain kind of visual construction of the ad that the respondents associated with the ads of international luxury fashion brands.

In the case of the second theme, the respondents did not used terms that could be linked to quality. Only few were mentioned:

“Colorful and expensive. Focused on cotton fabrics and prints.”

“Somehow the ad manages to create an image of products of high-quality and a high-class brand.”

Finally, the last theme that rose from the Japanese ad once again, also assessed from the quality perception, woke different evaluations. However, only one of the respondents described the brand to be of high quality based on this ad and many did not use any quality related terms to describe the brand, as certain confusion was somewhat evident as discussed earlier. Furthermore, this was the only ad that woke negative quality perceptions among the respondents:

“The dress in the picture doesn’t really look (made) of quality.”

“I don’t like the ad. The picture gives a cheap impression about the brand. It tries to be international and trendy without succeeding in it. Mixing two patterns creates a restless image.”

“Cheap, artificially artistic (tekotaiteellinen).”

The respondents’ answers give direction to the conclusion that the quality and the overall brand evaluations were strongly based on the feelings towards the ads’ visual appeal and how strong and clear the associations were to the Finnish origin.

6.4. Visual appeals

Different visual executions of ads affect consumers’ interpretations in different manners as discussed in subchapter 3.2. An (2007) stated that visual appeal is the most important part of an advertisement message. It was clear from the data, that the different visual executions of the ads affected

differently consumers' perceptions both towards the origin cues and the overall brand evaluations. The ads under evaluation represented different levels of openness. Furthermore, they also differed in the way they were either narrative or factual. As a result, the Marimekko brand was defined in varying ways.

Consumers may be transported into a story world through immersion in the work of art, such advertisement can be perceived as. Ad imagery is consumed as an enjoyable viewing experience, as an artwork itself. (Philips et al., 2010). This was rather evident again in the case of the ads of the theme "Narratives of Finland":

"The ad is really beautiful. Combining the strong fuchsia with a gloomy and atmospheric, nature themed fashion picture is a really successful and beautiful whole. You really want to linger in this. It is like a work of art, you could frame and hang on the wall."

"It's a beautiful ad, which has a successful colour theme. The field and the light make the dress' fabric show itself even more beautiful."

In contrast, the other two ads of the two themes of "I remember when..." and "Mixed perceptions" did not created similar descriptions that could make the ads to be assimilated with works of art. Instead, they arose interpretations that could be described in the case of the likely target group neutral or even negative:

"There's not happening anything, it's just a collection of pictures."

"My image is that the theme of the picture has been "the first model shoo" which means that the assignment of the girl in the picture has been to present a 15 years old beginner model who is posing for the first time to the

camera in a bit clumsy manner. Said this, there is a bit of feeling of an irc gallery posing.”

The data suggested that the two ads of the “Narratives of Finland” theme were ones that allowed the respondents to immerse in the world of the ads. These two ads could be described as open, as they do not include other verbal elements from the brand name. Furthermore, these two ads could be portrayed to be narrative as all the respondents could describe a happening in the ads, compared to the ad in the theme “I remember when...” that simply displayed products and could be thus described factual. Moreover, from this ad none of the respondents could find any happening. The ad from the theme “Mixed perceptions” was also rather open as the verbal elements of the ad did not really related to the picture in the way that they would provide a guidance towards a certain interpretation as discussed in the section 3.2.2. This ad did not either rose any narrative interpretations but rather the girl was simply perceived to “float in the air”. Overall, the ads in the “Narratives of Finland” created the most positive associations and the strongest immersion in the ads.

Philips et al. (2010) stated that when consumers create stories based on their own image associations, the brand story becomes part of their own story and the brand experience intensifies. In the case of the ads in the “Narratives of Finland” theme, some respondents continued the stories to their own lives, which makes the brand to have even more personal relevance:

“When you look at the ad, you start to think about a hot cup of tea, and you want to wrap yourself around with a warm big coat.”

“Your thoughts move to the events after the moment pictured in the ad – the girl goes home to enjoy a cup of tea (from Marimekko’s cups on a Marimekko’s tray?) and woolen socks (does Marimekko have these) in to her

cozy home in the candle light. I'd like to have a cup of tea and light some candles."

Thompson et al. (1997) suggest that consumers can use fashion images to envision an ideal consumption world, a lifestyle that is not currently available. In the hectic lives, people are often seeking a place to "escape to", and ads can provide a place for an imaginary escape place through their narratives. Fashion ads often include elements that permit consumers to perform a narrative (Philips et al., 2010). This was also the case with the ads of the "Narratives of Finland" theme:

"The picture of the model on the corn field in a sun light is a great shot and it creates feelings of freedom, relaxedness, closeness to nature, freshness and timelessness. That "I wish I could wonder around on a corn field looking great and enjoy the warmth of the sun in my back and the smell of the wheat in my nose". A wonderful dream."

Ballantyne et al. (2006) suggest that authenticity and integrity are likely to attract modern consumers and the heritage is one of the most precious assets in creating an image of these. An opposite of the hectic city lives are nature and countryside that are also strongly linked to the Finnish origin as defined in the subchapter 6.1. Thus, it might be argued that associations to the Finnish origin might provide a place for escapism through narrative imagery appeals in advertisement.

7. Conclusions

In this chapter, the conclusions of this research are drawn. The first subchapter summarizes the research and the key findings will be presented. In the second subchapter the managerial implications are discussed. The final subchapter examines the limitations of this research and gives suggestions for further studies.

7.1. *Summary and key findings*

In this subchapter the research will be summarized and the key findings will be discussed. The purpose of this explorative study was to examine how consumers perceive origin cues through visual appeals in the international advertisement of Finnish fashion brands.

Guided by the previous research questions, the theoretical part of this thesis studied the relationship of brand identity and the country of brand origin, and how this origin information is associated with the brand image by consumers. The meaning of consumers' origin cue perceptions was also discussed. Furthermore, the origin cue transfer through visual appeals in international fashion advertisement and consumers' ad interpretations was examined.

The focus of the theoretical framework of this thesis was on consumers' origin perceptions, brand evaluations, and on the process of how consumers perceive these through advertising. Furthermore, these dimensions are influenced by the cultural context where the brand functions in, and the specificities of the fashion industry in which brands compete on saturated markets and where competitive advantage is gained through differentiated design through which consumers perceive added value (Salimäki, 2003, 19; Walsh et al. 1992; Riedel, Roy et al. 1996; see Lindström et al., 2006, 35).

The origin related perceptions affect the quality evaluations of the brand, as some countries are viewed more favourably as producers of certain product categories than others. Especially in the case of design brands the link between quality and the country of origin is vital. The associated country image is either an asset or a liability depending on whether it is considered to be positive or negative (Lambert et al., 1998). Based on the evaluation of origin cues, the perceived brand origin leads to more general perceptions, expectations about the brand (Thakor et al., 2003). Positive match between the perceived brand origin and the brand associations leads to positive brand evaluations.

Consumers create origin perceptions through the origin cues they detect from the brand's advertisement. Advertisement can be used for image creation when the execution is visually led, or for more informational communication with more verbal content describing product features. Visual ads are often used to transfer narratives that immerse consumers in the brand stories that are commonly emotionally loaded. Fashion ads consist most often of visual element and include elements that allow narrative creation. (Philips et al., 2010). The term ad openness is used to refer to the quantity of guidance towards a planned interpretation. Brand associations to an origin are a strong source of brand appeal and they are used largely in advertising (Thakor et al., 2003), especially in fashion advertising, as heritage and roots play often an important role for the brand identity of these brands. Besides the previous dimension, the cultural context where the advertisement is published affects the ad's visual and textual execution. A single picture may encompass several highly sophisticated interrelated signs and various levels of meanings (Bulmer et al., 2006). However, each culture has its own history, mythology, conventions and sign systems that create a base on how people interpret their environment. Consumers reflect the signs of ads to these cultural signs, thus, creating different interpretations. Furthermore, the evaluation of origin clues is done in comparison to the existing knowledge of the image of the country of the brand origin, as the associations related to the country are transferred to and compared with the origin cues in the advertisement. The overall evaluations of the brand

associations lead to the creation of brand image in consumers' minds. At an abstract level, brand associations are considered in the form of benefits and brand attitudes that sum-up the information related to the brand. These form a more relevant relationship with the consumer self than product attributes do. (Hsieh et al. 2005). Thus, it is vital that the created image, and all the associations leading to this are positive.

In the theoretical framework of this thesis it was proposed that the level of quality of the brand is perceived through the quality associations linked to the country of brand origin. However, from the data, no brand quality assessments rose based on the perceived level of quality of the country of origin, that is Finland. Lambert et al. (1998) stated that some factors might moderate the effects of the origin information in the evaluation process of a brand such as previous experience and familiarity with a country's products. Since the respondents all lived in Finland they are most likely to be highly familiar with the products originating from Finland. It might be that the quality perceptions of Finland are so deeply built in the respondents' knowledge that the level of quality based on the origin is associated with Finnish brands without conscious effort to reach any clues from memory. Furthermore, if there had been a contradiction between the perceived quality level of the country of the brand origin and the brand, this dimension might have risen from the data. Said this, it might be argued that for this reason no level of quality assessment based on the country of origin rose from the data.

According to Archpru et al. (2004) advertising plays a key role in driving the flow of cultural meanings through narrative-based and image centered descriptions. The results of this study seemed to support this statement. It was rather clear from the data that the ads through which Marimekko was evaluated the most positively and through which clear associations with Finland were formed, were the ones that were visually led and narrative. The open visuality allowed the respondents to immerse in the world of ads and perform narratives. Furthermore, the narratives transferred through the ads had strong associations to the Finnish origin that was defined rather stereotypically by the respondents through descriptions of nature, trustworthiness, determination etc.

Ketalaar et al. (2012) expressed that ad openness reduces the likelihood that consumers are able to create any interpretation. The results of this study both supported and opposed this finding. Open ads may lead to confusion, if no interpretations can be drawn or there is a possibility for various interpretations. This was clearly the case with the ad in the theme “Mixed messages” which affected several interpretations also on the brand origin, and furthermore led to mixed and even negative brand evaluations. However, the most positively evaluated ads were also open, as they were highly image centered, but the difference was that these ads caused an immersion in the world of the ads, as the respondents created stories around these. Furthermore, all the interpretations were rather similar to each other. One of the factors explaining this might be that all the respondents perceived somewhat strong Finnish origin cues from the ads, which might provide guidance towards a certain kinds of stories and interpretations. This finding also seems to give some support to the statement of Philips et al. (2010) that pretty models, splendid surroundings and spectacular clothes are not enough to trigger engagement in consumers and produce immersion. The respondents did not create stories based on the ad of the theme “Mixed messages”, which might be because they were not really able to associate narrative elements with the ad. However, the intended Japanese audience might find signs in this ad through which they would be able to perform narratives. This would need further studies.

According to Jackson & Shaw (2009, 122-123), the country of origin is a key feature consumers look for in a luxury product. As discussed earlier, consumers evaluate brands in comparison substitutes. The ads in the theme “Narratives of Finland” were compared with international luxury brands, as the visual appeal of these ads was perceived to be similar to the ones of brands such as Chanel and YSL. Furthermore, these were the ads that created the strongest associations to the Finnish origin.

On the other hand, the association with luxury brands was not created in the case of the other ads. These ads, especially the one in theme “I remember when...” created perceptions of Marimekko more as a brand that is part of peoples’ daily lives. Moreover, the link to the Finnish origin was not as clear

as in the theme of “Narratives of Finland”. Even though associations to the Finnish origin were made, these were based highly on the respondents’ personal experiences and memories, and thus might not be created by consumers that do not have as strong links to Finland as the respondents did. The ad of the theme “I remember when...” could be described factual, rather than centered on image creation. These findings might suggest that mass-produced design products are not evaluated on the same basis as luxury products are, and furthermore, Marimekko is compared with different substitutes depending on the context.

Liu (2005) suggested that when the brand origin is viewed favourably, the advertising strategy should create and strengthen the memory representation of the brand in such a manner that both the controlled remembrance of brand attributes and the country stereotype that is automatically activated should enhance the same image, not two different types of country images. This might be one of the reasons the ad of “Mixed perceptions” was evaluated on mixed, or even less favourable terms. The respondents found several cues referring to Japan in this ad, which may have affected confused perceptions, since the respondents have strong ties to Finland and are likely to link Marimekko powerfully to Finland. Thus, the respondents perceived cues of two different origins from the ad, which might lead to confused origin interpretations.

As discussed earlier, consumers’ perceptions of country images tend to be stereotypical. From the respondents’ definitions of the Finnish origin, it was rather clear that these descriptions support this suggestion, as all the respondents’ definitions were based on associations of nature, “sisu”, simplicity etc. that are generally considered to be stereotypical definitions of Finnish origin. Hsieh et al. (2005) stated that successful global marketing demands that the core brand associations remain consistent across international markets and that these remain positive. Interestingly even the Finnish respondents defined the Finnish origin rather stereotypically. If Finland’s image is created from stereotypical associations all around the world, this might provide a basis for consistent brand associations across international markets.

However, even though the ads under evaluation in this thesis affected different kinds of brand associations in the respondents and led to various brand evaluations, which is somewhat in line with the previous statement of Hsieh et al. (2005), it should be noted that generally, Marimekko has a positive reputation in Japan. While the Marimekko's ad published in Japan did not create consistent evaluations in the respondents, the Japanese target audience to which it was intended might evaluate it differently. As discussed earlier, consumers evaluate different signs in relation to the sign system of their own culture and sociological context. Thus, the Japanese audience may create associations with Marimekko based on this ad that the respondents of this thesis would perceive through different kinds of cues.

7.2. *Managerial implications*

Ballantyne et al. (2006) stated that in contemporary society visually striking brands are more likely to catch consumers' attention. Visual appeal is the most significant aspect of an advertising message (An, 2007). This is especially important for fashion brands that are of aesthetic nature. Furthermore, fashion has the capability to 'speak' for consumers, subcultures, and even for entire societies (Kuruc, 2008). Heritage and the country of origin are important influencers for brands and origin cues are largely used in advertising when creating favorable images. Moreover, as Jackson & Shaw (2009, 122-123) stated, the country of origin is a key feature consumers look for in a luxury product.

The findings of this thesis suggested that consumers are evaluating ads that are highly visual and through which they are able to perform narrative are evaluated more favorable. In contemporary culture consumers are not only viewing ads as a source of brand information, but they are rather consumed as such, as providers of pleasurable experiences, special attention to the

visual execution and to the complex levels of different signs should be paid. Ads are consumed as “work of art” and furthermore they should be able to transfer narrative meanings to consumers.

Especially, when the advertised brand is wanted to be perceived in comparison to luxury brands, the ads should be highly visual and allow consumers to immerse in the world of the ads. Luxury brands are not brands available for everyone, but through the narrative transfer created by the ads, everybody has a possibility to gain a piece of an imaginary world, or a lifestyle that is not currently available for them. By providing these pleasurable experiences, brands may be able to deepen the brand-consumer relationship.

Moreover, the findings seemed to indicate that consumers evaluated origin cues positively and the image of the country of brand origin was leveraged to the brand image when the match between the brand and the origin was clear and positive. Reference to the brand origin would be thus an association that could be communicated to consumers through visual appeals, if there is a clear link between the country of origin and the identity of the brand.

As discussed earlier, the global markets set some challenges for international advertising. Fashion is visual by its nature and most often so is the advertising of fashion brands. Thus, there is often no need for verbal localizations. However, the images can possess complex levels of meanings that are interpreted differently depending on the viewer’s cultural context. The findings of this thesis might give some support for this statement, as the respondents were not able to create clear interpretations from ads that were targeted to consumers of different cultures. However, people are travelling more than ever and the same media may be consumed in several countries around the world. This leads to the possibility that consumers are exposed to ads that were not necessarily meant for them. Nevertheless, the findings hinted that country images are stereotypical and thus, they might be similarly perceived around the world. If there is a clear match between the brand and the origin, origin cues in the visual appeals of fashion brands’ international

marketing might be a possible reservoir for creating a coherent brand image around the world. However, this would need further studies.

7.3. Limitations of the research and suggestions for further studies

The phenomenon under study – consumers' origin perceptions through visual appeals – is rather multilayered but also current, as contemporary consumer culture is becoming increasingly visual.

Samiee et al. (2005) stated that consumers could hold accurate brand origin information in their memory, and thus they link brands to their respective countries. The respondents of this research had strong ties to Finland, which may have affected the results, as the respondents possess most certainly deep knowledge on the Finnish origin and attitudes towards Marimekko, even though they might not consciously know this. In order to gain a deeper understanding on the subject under study in this thesis, the same research should be conducted with respondents without such a strong tie to Finland. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore how the intended target audience would evaluate the same ads, and how they would perceive the origin cues in the ads.

As discussed earlier, consumers' interpretation of visual elements is dependable with their cultural context. Fashion ads are often visual and transfer narratives. However, as Bulmer et al. (2006) stated, a single picture may encompass several highly sophisticated interrelated signs and numerous levels of meanings. Consumers reflect the signs of ads to their own cultural signs, thus, creating different interpretations. Even though the respondents were not able to perform narratives through the clues of the ad in the theme "mixed messages", this might not be the case with the intended Japanese audience. Further research would be needed to examine, whether the Japanese consumers would find clues in the ad that would permit them to create stories around this ad.

One of the most important references for the data analysis was the definition of Finnish origin. As this is not a notion that could be found in dictionaries, it was vital for the research to define this. The definition for the Finnish origin used in this thesis was based on the definitions given by the respondents. Even though almost all of the respondents were Finnish, the definitions were rather stereotypical. The results drawn from the data were dependable on the definition of the Finnish origin and they might alter, if the Finnish origin would gain alternative definitions. Thus, it would be interesting to explore, how consumers all around the world would define the notion of Finnish origin.

This thesis tried to provide insight on how consumers perceive origin cues through the visual appeals in the international advertising of Finnish fashion brands. This research was exploratory in nature and did not strove for results that would be generalizable to all contexts. Even though this research may provide direction towards more generalizable theory, the research had limitations and the results of this thesis should be approached with certain reservation.

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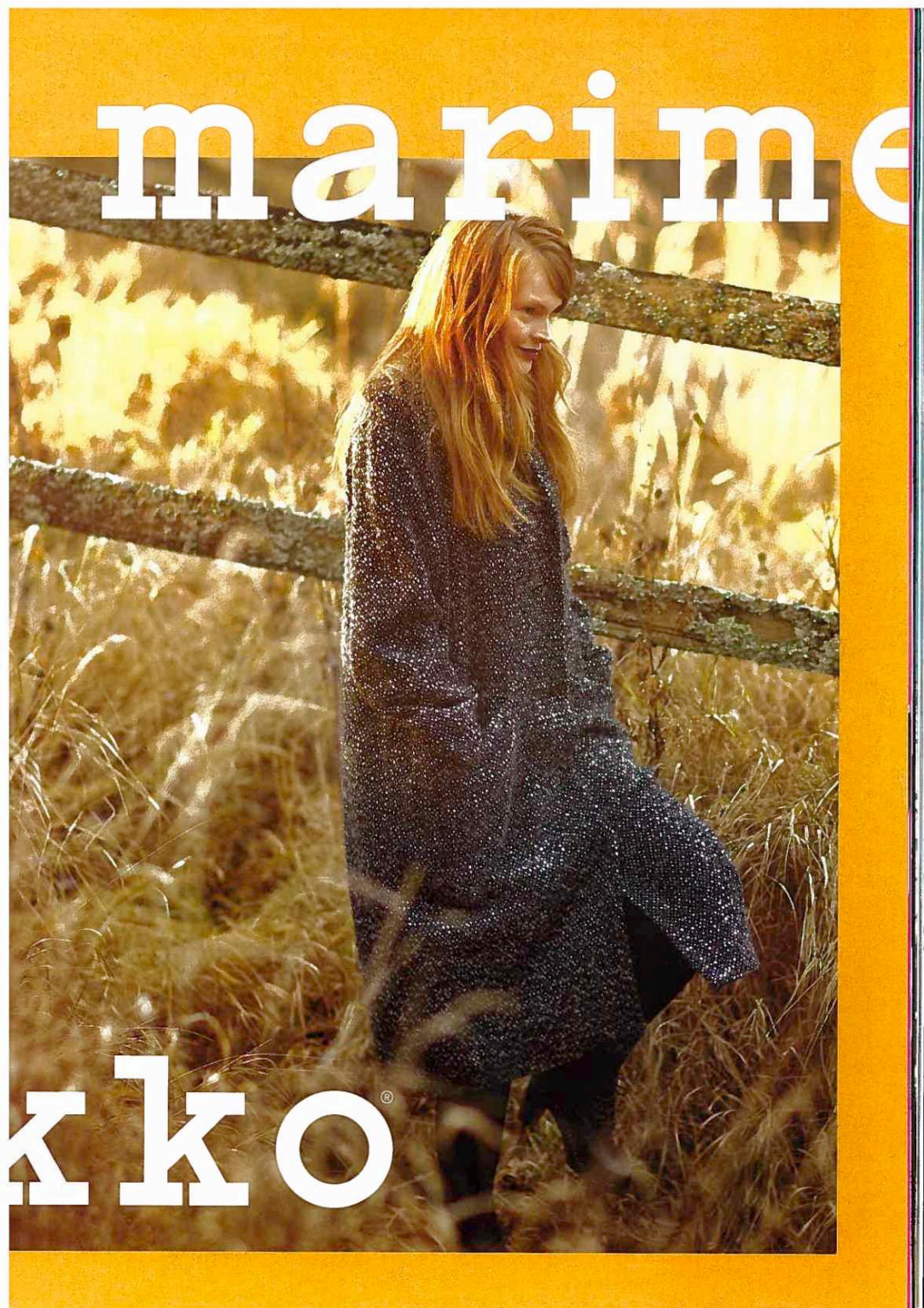
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http://www.ek.fi/www/fi/talous/tietoa_Suomen_taloudesta/tavaravienninrakenne.php (17.2.2011)

Appendix 1: Ad published in Japan



Appendix 2: Ad published in Gloria magazine (10/2012)



Appendix 3: Ad published in New York Times Magazine (autumn 2011)



Appendix 4: Ad published in NYT (7. -13.9.2012)

